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started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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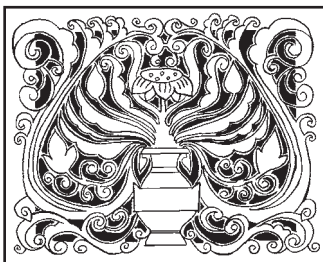
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TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

Jivanmukti: Freedom in Life

May 2008
Vol. 113, No. 5

यदा सर्वे प्रमुच्यन्ते कामा येऽस्य हृदि श्रिताः ।
अथ मर्त्योऽमृतो भवत्यत्र ब्रह्म समश्नुते ॥

When all desires that dwell in his heart (mind) are gone, then he, having been mortal, becomes immortal, and attains Brahman in this very body. *(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.7)*

निर्धनोऽपि सदा तुष्टोऽप्यसहायो महाबलः ।
नित्यतृप्तोऽप्यभुञ्जानोऽप्यसमः समदर्शनः ॥

Though without riches, yet ever content; though helpless, yet very powerful, though not enjoying sense objects, yet eternally satisfied; though without an exemplar, yet looking upon all with an eye of equality—such is the *jivanmukta*. *(Vivekachudamani, 543)*

अपि कुर्वन्नकुर्वाणश्चाभोक्ता फलभोग्यपि ।
शरीर्यप्यशरीर्येष परिच्छिन्नोऽपि सर्वगः ॥

Though doing, yet inactive; though experiencing fruits of past actions, yet untouched by them; though possessed of a body, yet without identification with it; though limited, yet omnipresent is he. *(544)*

रागद्वेषभयादीनामनुरूपं चरन्नपि ।
योऽन्तर्व्योमवदत्यच्छः स जीवन्मुक्त उच्यते ॥

He is a *jivanmukta* who, although responsive to the spurs of love, hate, fear, and the like, is as pure in heart as the *akasha*, space. *(Laghu Yogavasishtha Ramayana, 5.93)*

मौने मौनी गुणिनि गुणवान्पण्डिते पण्डितश्च ।
दीने दीनः सुखिनि सुखवान्भोगिनि प्राप्तभोगः ॥
मूर्खे मूर्खो युवतिषु युवा वाग्मिनि प्रौढवाग्मी ।
धन्यः कोऽपि त्रिभुवनजयी योऽवधूतेऽवधूतः ॥

He, the conqueror of the three worlds, is indeed blessed, who is silent in silence, honourable among the virtuous, wise among the learned, poor amidst the indigent, blissful among the happy, contented amidst enjoyers, simple amidst fools, youthful amidst lasses, the orator amidst speakers, and the liberated amidst renouncers. *(Jivanmuktanandalahari, 18)*

THIS MONTH

‘Knowledge is that which liberates,’ says an old dictum. Humans suffer bondage at various levels, the most subtle being that effected by the deeper layers of the psyche. Liberation of the mind and the spirit has a unique existential value and spiritual significance. **The Joy of Freedom** resulting from transcendence of personal limitations is ineffable. The present issue explores facets of that knowledge which leads to this joy.

Self-effort or Self-surrender? is a perpetual dilemma for the novice on the spiritual path. Self-effort can bolster egotism whilst notions of surrender can camouflage mental laziness. Swami Adiswaranandaji, who had been Minister-in-Charge, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, explores this paradox and shows how it is resolved.

What Is Reality? is the central question engaging the minds and hearts of spiritual aspirants pursuing the path of jnana. Our conception of reality determines the spiritual path that we follow and the ends we set for ourselves. Swami Nityasthanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Mysore, shows us how consciousness determines reality.

Adhyasa or superimposition is the Advaitic explanation for the phenomenal world that obscures the reality of Brahman. Attainment of spiritual freedom involves elimination of *adhyasa*. Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Vice Chancellor, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur, examines the spiritual significance of *adhyasa* in the light of a well-known paper by Prof. K C Bhattacharyya, in **Understanding Adhyāsa**.

That consciousness underpins and pervades the world of phenomenal existence is a key insight into

the nature of reality provided by Advaita Vedanta. In the first instalment of her expository article on **Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta**, Pravrajika Brahmapranaji of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, reviews the major categories of consciousness and their relation to the human psychophysical system.

Swami Satyamayanandaji, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, explores the diverse facets of the food that nourishes our physical, psychic, and spiritual being in **Food for All**.

The *mahavakyas* or ‘great Vedic dicta’ encapsulate the remarkable truth of the essential unity of the human soul and the Divine. The sadhanas of the Upanishads are based on this reality. Prof. Debabrata Sen Sharma, Professor of Indology, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, provides insights into the spiritual significance of these dicta in **The Mahāvākyas: Their Role in Sadhana**.

In **Cosmological Reflections in Ancient Indian Literature**, Rita Roy Chowdhury, Head, Department of Education, Vivekananda College for Women, Kolkata, examines some of the important features of Vedic, Upanishadic, and Puranic cosmology and highlights their common bases.

Sri Dilip Dhopavkar and Sri Prashant Puppall conclude their presentation of selected proceeding of the seminar on value perceptions of youth, organized by the Ramakrishna Math, Pune, in **Facing Ethical Dilemmas**.

Narayan Chandra Ghosh’s **Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna** have been translated from Bengali by Swami Chetananandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis.

EDITORIAL

The Joy of Freedom

WHEN Mahendranath Gupta, or M, the celebrated recorder of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, first saw the Master, he was left speechless: 'It was as if he were standing where all the holy places met and as if Śukadeva himself were speaking the word of God, or as if Sri Chaitanya were singing the name and glories of the Lord in Puri with Rāmānanda, Swarup, and other devotees.

'Sri Ramakrishna said: "When, hearing the name of Hari or Rāma once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform such devotions as sandhyā any more."

The impress was irresistible: 'What a beautiful place!' M said to himself, 'What a charming man! How beautiful his words are! I have no wish to move from this spot.'

Living with Sri Ramakrishna meant being in perennial divine bliss. M records a scene with Narendranātha (later Swami Vivekananda) singing in his exquisite voice:

Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,
The Stainless One, Pure Spirit through and
through.

How peerless is the Light that in Him shines!
How soul-bewitching is His wondrous form!
How dear is He to all his devotees!

Sri Ramakrishna 'stood motionless, with eyes transfixed. He seemed not even to breathe'. M had never seen this phenomenon; it was samadhi. He wondered, 'Is it possible for a man to be so oblivious of the outer world in the consciousness of God? How deep his faith and devotion must be to bring about such a state!'

Narendranātha continued to sing:

Ever more beautiful in fresh-blossoming love
That shames the splendour of a million moons,
Like lightning gleams the glory of His form,
Raising erect the hair for very joy.

'The Master shuddered when this last line was sung. His hair stood on end, and tears of joy streamed down his cheeks. Now and then his lips parted in a smile. Was he seeing the peerless beauty of God, "that shames the splendour of a million moons"? Was this the vision of God, the Essence of Spirit? How much austerity and discipline, how much faith and devotion, must be necessary for such a vision!'

If M saw the legendary Shukadeva in Sri Ramakrishna, he did not see wrongly. For the latter was as devoid of body-consciousness as Shuka. And this state of theirs was derived from their identification with the Divine. Shuka had 'wandered forth from home and relatives, all alone, dutiless, from his very birth by virtue of his enlightened state, and who, when followed by his grief-stricken father Dvaipayana (Vyasa) with cries of "O son! Where are you?" answered, as it were, those anxious calls through the resonance of the forest trees, of which and of everything else he was the soul on account of his realization of the truth of Non-duality'.

The freedom and divine joy expressed by a Ramakrishna or a Shukadeva is innate. The *Aitareya Upanishad* records the experience of the rishi Vamadeva, while still in the womb: 'Even while lying in the womb, I came to know of the birth of all the gods. A hundred iron citadels held me down. Then, like a hawk, I forced my way through by dint of knowledge of the Self.'

Of the person who has obtained freedom from the shackles of the body and mind the *Taittiriya Upanishad* announces: 'He attains self-rule. He

attains the lordship of the mind; he attains the lordship of speech; he attains the lordship of sight; he attains the lordship of hearing; he attains the lordship of intelligence. Furthermore, he becomes Brahman, whose body is space (*akasha*), whose nature is true, who delights in life (*prana*) and rejoices in the mind, who abounds in peace, who is immortal.'

'He who knows the Bliss that is Brahman,' the Upanishad further announces, 'is not afraid of anything whatsoever.' For, 'One becomes fearless on obtaining lodgement in that invisible, incorporeal, indefinable, fearless, supportless support of all.' 'Such a person does not distress oneself with such thoughts as: "Why did I not do what is good? Why did I do what is evil?" For, whosoever knows this (Bliss that is Brahman) regards both (good and evil) as Atman, and cherishes both as Atman.'

This apparently antinomial position is the result of the perception of unity and a deep identity with all Creation: 'The sage Vamadeva, having realized this [Self] as That (Brahman), came to know: "I was Manu and the sun." And to this day, whoever in a like manner knows the Self as "I am Brahman", becomes all this (universe).'

That this experience should be remarkably exhilarating can be well imagined. And the *Taittiriya Upanishad* confirms this: 'How wonderful! How wonderful! How wonderful! I am the food. I am the food. I am the food! I am the eater of food. I am the eater of food. I am the eater of food! I am the maker of their unity. I am the maker of their unity. I am the maker of their unity!'


The *Vivekachudamani* provides a fascinating portrait of such knowers of Brahman: 'They have their food without anxiety or humiliation—by begging—and their drink from the water of rivers; they live freely and independently, and sleep without fear in cremation grounds and forests; their clothing may be the quarters themselves, which need no washing and drying, or bark (or similar stuff); and the earth their bed. They roam the paths of Vedanta and have their pleasure in the Supreme Brahman.'

If this image does not appeal to our minds, then we could remember the thoughts of Janaka, the famous king of Mithila, on emerging from samadhi: 'I desire not what is not got, nor do I surrender what is already got. What is mine let that be mine; composed, I abide in the Self.' And the *Laghu Yogavasishta* affirms: 'Janaka, making up his mind thus, arose to perform without any attachment the work that came of its own, even as the sun rises to shine. Neither does he speculate about the future, nor think of what is past; ever smiling he acts in the living present.'

If enlightened souls have no personal desires, they still are a source of blessing and bounty to the people around them. It is for this reason that the *Mundaka Upanishad* exhorts those desirous of prosperity to 'worship the knower of the Self', for 'whatever world persons of pure understanding envisage in their minds and whatever desires they cherish, that world they conquer and those desires they obtain'.

But the greatest blessing offered by these souls—who have the Divine, the source of all good, seated in their hearts—is the ambrosia of divine bliss, for 'theirs is perpetual celebration, perpetual prosperity, and perpetual goodness'.

'When illumination is attained,' Acharya Shankara asserts, 'the entire world becomes a paradise, and people become like celestial wish-fulfilling trees. The entire mass of water becomes sweet and holy like Ganga water, and all women become full of beauty and sanctity; all speech whether in the language of gods or of men becomes, as it were, the highest and holiest verse of the Vedas. The whole world becomes a holy place like Varanasi, and every movement becomes a movement of joy.'

This is the state of *jivanmukti*—freedom while living—and rishis tell us that not only is this the highest human achievement but that it is well within the reach of all. 'When I first read the verse in which it is said that life is meant for the realization of *jivanmukti*,' Swami Turiyananda recalled, 'I leapt in joy, for that indeed was the purpose of my life.' This is the purpose of our lives too. 

Self-effort or Self-surrender?

Swami Adiswarananda

The Need for Direct Perception

THE goal of all spiritual quest is direct perception of the Ultimate—generally known as communion or union with God, Self-knowledge, or true liberation. That alone can put an end to all doubts, sorrows, and sufferings of life, and guarantee us everlasting peace and happiness here and hereafter. Direct perception is more than belief in the scriptures, intellectual conviction, or emotional experience. Scriptures are human documents written by human hands, although we believe they contain divine words. Some people heard the words of God in their minds; but when such people interpreted what they heard through their minds, the words became coloured by their thoughts and emotions. That is why there are many and diverse kinds of scriptures, and sages and saints are never unanimous in what they say. Believing in a scripture is, therefore, believing in the experiences of another person. Intellectual conviction can never reveal the face of truth. Reasoning may indicate possibility or probability, but can never arrive at certainty. Reason begins with doubt and also ends in doubt. One reason can be countered by another reason. Our so-called rational conviction is the result of mental processes profoundly influenced by our traditions, conventions, and prejudices. Emotional experiences do not live long. They do not transform us permanently. Moreover, emotional experiences can be the result of sentimentalism, wishful thinking, or auto-suggestion. Hence, direct perception is vital.

There are four tests of direct spiritual perception. Valid direct perception is never superseded by a subsequent experience; it is never contradictory to reasoning and common sense; it transforms the experiencer forever; and it is always conducive to the welfare of all beings.

But how are we to attain to the goal of direct perception? Scriptural passages tell us that intense, all-out effort is necessary for this purpose. Nothing happens without effort. The bondage of the soul created by ego, desires, attachments, and aversions, all due to self-indulgence and Self-forgetfulness, cannot be overcome without self-effort. The Bhagavadgita says: 'Let a man be lifted up by his own self; let him not lower himself; for he himself is his friend, and he himself is his enemy.'¹

At the same time, other scriptural passages remind us that all such efforts are of little value. Communion or union with God cannot be programmed or scheduled by our effort. It happens by the will of the Divine; and when it will happen nobody can predict. 'It is attained by him alone whom It chooses. To such a one, Atman reveals Its own form.'² The only way to attain the goal is to totally surrender to the divine will in all matters and wait patiently. This is a puzzle and a mystery for seekers on the spiritual path.

Self-effort

Self-effort is emphasized for the following reasons:

- All progress—whether in spiritual or secular matters—is actualized through self-effort. A biblical passage tells us: 'Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.'³ And the Sanskrit word *kripa*, or grace, derives from *kri*, or do, and *pa*, or achieve. Nothing happens by itself; everything requires effort. A deer does not walk into the mouth of a lion. The groceries we buy do not turn themselves into dinner. The light of the sun cannot enter our rooms until we raise our window shades and let it in. Shankaracharya says: 'As a treasure hidden underground requires (for its extraction)

competent instruction, excavation, the removal of stones and other such things lying above it and (finally) grasping, but never comes out by being (merely) called out by name, so the transparent Truth of the Self, which is hidden by Māyā and its effects, is to be attained through the instructions of a knower of Brahman, followed by reflection, meditation, and so forth.⁴ Intense effort is necessary to demolish the walls of our ego, our desires, attachments, and the like—walls that have imprisoned our soul and subjected it to the endless chain of birth, death, and suffering.

- The results of past karma can be countered only by our present karma. Truth is revealed only when the mirror of our mind is cleansed by our own effort. The practice of discrimination, renunciation, self-control, prayer, meditation, and austerity in thought, word, and deed is what we call self-effort. The bondage created by our selfish thoughts and actions can be overcome by our selfless thoughts and actions. Only by such effort can we prepare ourselves to achieve direct perception. We get what we deserve, and our deserving depends upon our doing.

- Exerting oneself is the very essence of life. Only the dead do not exert themselves. Trying not to make any effort is also an effort. It is better to do something than to do nothing. It is better to wear out than to rust out.

- We exert ourselves and believe in doing in every walk of life. So, how can it be otherwise in spiritual matters? To practise self-surrender in spiritual matters while making effort in all other matters would be disingenuous.

- Self-surrender is meaningless until we have conquered our self through effort. It is not possible to offer our mind to God unless we have, to a certain extent, controlled our mind, and the control of our mind is never possible unless we have made repeated efforts to succeed in it. Swami Brahmananda says: 'The mind rebels against effort. It always seeks ease and comfort, but if you wish to attain anything you must force it to struggle. That is the only way to make your mind steady. ... Regular war must be

waged against the mind. To force the mind to obey you is the ideal of spiritual discipline.'⁵

Therefore, scriptures and traditions exhort us to sincerely struggle to reach the goal. The *Katha Upanishad* tells us: 'He who has not first turned away from wickedness, who is not tranquil and subdued, and whose mind is not at peace, cannot attain the Atman.'⁶ Again: 'Arise! Awake! Approach the great and learn. Like the sharp edge of a razor is that path, so the wise say—hard to tread and difficult to cross' (1.3.14).

Shankaracharya says: 'Therefore the wise should, as in the case of disease and the like, personally strive by all means in their power to be free from the bondage of repeated births and deaths.'⁷

Self-surrender

Sages and saints tell us that there is an element of divine grace in the outcome of the spiritual quest. Effort has a limit; its purpose is to cleanse the mirror of our mind. It has no connection with Self-knowledge. Karma (effort) cannot produce Self-knowledge. No one can say that one's action will produce the desired results. No effort, however efficient and intelligent, can ensure success. In the Gita, Sri Krishna describes five factors that determine the success of any action: 'Learn from Me, O mighty Arjuna, the five causes that bring about the accomplishment of a work, as declared in the philosophy of knowledge, which puts an end to all action: The body, the doer, the different senses, the many and various functions of the vital breaths, and the presiding deity as the fifth.'⁸ The first factor is the field of action; the second, the agent of action; the third, the instruments of action; and the fourth, the various efforts made by the performer for accomplishing the action. These four factors indicate that a performer of action must have the physical, mental, and intellectual fitness for the endeavour. One must be equipped with the necessary instruments, must have knowledge of the field of one's action, and must be efficient in one's effort. Yet, even when all the first four factors are fulfilled, the accomplishment of the action cannot be ensured. No one has control over the fifth factor, which the

Gita describes as divine grace. The concept of divine grace makes it clear that the world process is not governed by mechanical laws.

Our ego obstructs the vision of God. Self-effort calls for assertion of the ego and thereby increases it. The view that effort accomplishes everything makes God a commodity that can be purchased at will. To believe this is to believe that our will is free. But the term 'free will' is a misnomer. Our will may be free to a limited extent, but it is never absolutely free.

Self-effort is futile without the intervention of divine grace. And divine grace calls for absolute and total self-surrender. First we have to surrender the results of our actions, then all activities, after that the entire mind, and finally the whole ego. The story of the weaver in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* illustrates the real spirit of self-surrender: There was a weaver in a certain village who was a very pious soul. He used to sell his production in the market, telling each customer that, 'by the will of Rāma,' the exact amount of the materials he used and the profit he made was such and such. Everyone trusted and loved him. One night he could not get to sleep. He was sitting in the worship hall when a band of robbers happened to pass that way and forced him to go with them. After committing a robbery in a house, they compelled the weaver to carry their goods. Suddenly the police arrived and the robbers ran away. The weaver was arrested, and brought to trial the next day. The villagers learnt what had happened, came to the court, and told the magistrate that this man could never commit a robbery. Then the magistrate asked the weaver to make his statement.

The weaver said: 'Your Honour, by the will of Rāma I finished my meal at night. Then by the will of Rāma I was sitting in the worship hall. It was quite late at night by the will of Rāma. By the will of Rāma I had been thinking of God and chanting His name and glories, when by the will of Rāma a band of robbers passed that way. By the will of Rāma they dragged me with them; by the will of Rāma they committed a robbery in a house; and by the will of Rāma they put a load on my head. Just then, by the will of Rāma the police arrived, and by the will of Rāma I was arrested. Then by

the will of Rāma the police kept me in the lock-up for the night, and this morning by the will of Rāma I have been brought before Your Honour.' The magistrate realized that the weaver was a pious man and ordered his release. On his way home the weaver said to his friends, 'By the will of Rāma I have been released.'⁹

Self-effort and Self-surrender

In the end we realize that both self-effort and self-surrender make our spiritual quest successful. They are not contradictory but complementary. Self-effort prepares us for self-surrender, and self-surrender prepares us for divine grace.

The finite mind can never grasp and realize the infinite. It is the other way round. The infinite engulfs the finite. Patanjali describes this as the 'in-filling of nature'. When we remove the obstacles, the light of knowledge engulfs the soul. We need to completely surrender ourselves to the divine, and the divine will lead us to the goal. Self-effort, however, is necessary to know the limits of our effort. Sri Ramakrishna says that self-effort is meant to tire our wings:

A bird sat absent-mindedly on the mast of a ship anchored in the Ganges. Slowly the ship sailed out into the ocean. When the bird came to its senses, it could find no shore in any direction. It flew toward the north hoping to reach land; it went very far and grew very tired but could find no shore. What could it do? It returned to the ship and sat on the mast. After a long while the bird flew away again, this time toward the east. It couldn't find land in that direction either; everywhere it saw nothing but limitless ocean. Very tired, it again returned to the ship and sat on the mast. After resting a long while, the bird went toward the south, and then toward the west. When it found no sign of land in any direction, it came back and settled down on the mast. It did not leave the mast again, but sat there without making any further effort. It no longer felt restless or worried. Because it was free from worry, it made no further effort (792).

Self-surrender is surrendering everything—our body, mind, and soul—to the Divine. In this


surrender there is no complaining, no regret, only patient waiting for the final moment of revelation. There is no grudging effort, only spontaneous loving submission to the divine will. But self-surrender is never possible until we have recovered our mind through self-effort. Self-surrender without self-effort is meaningless. In the Gita, Sri Krishna advises Arjuna to 'constantly remember Me and fight'. To 'fight' is to make effort, and to 'remember Me' is to surrender to the will of God. Bearing all troubles and tribulations with humility is the real test of self-surrender. Self-surrender reveals the fact that God does everything for us. In ignorance we think that we do everything.

Shankaracharya speaks of three indispensable prerequisites for liberation: human birth, intense longing for liberation, and the grace of a knower of Self. Effort is the beginning of grace. And grace comes when we depend fully upon God, when we do not look for any alternative, any other way. Manifestations of grace begin with our effort. First, God inspires us with auspicious desires, then gives us strength to make intense self-effort. Finally, divine grace descends when a seeker totally surrenders him- or herself to the Divine. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna:

The state of a servant's house will tell you unmistakably whether his master has decided to visit it. First, the rubbish and jungle around the house are cleared up. Second, the soot and the dirt are removed from the rooms. Third, the courtyard, floors, and other places are swept clean. Finally the master himself sends various things to the house, such as a carpet, a hubble-bubble for smoking, and the like. When you see these things arriving, you conclude that the master will very soon come (203).

In brief, we cannot desire God unless God desires us. We cannot choose him unless he chooses us. We will not feel like praying unless he wants our prayer. We cannot serve him unless he wants our service. We cannot long for him unless he longs for us. We never feel lifted up unless he lifts us up. A drop of water does not jump up to the sky—the sun lifts it up by transforming it into vapour.

The Gita tells us that God is the goal of all yoga and that he provides *yogakshema*, or making all conditions favourable for the attainment of yoga. His grace sustains us in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end. True self-surrender makes us realize this fact. He makes us pass through many trials and tribulations, helps us to practise virtues, penances, and austerities to prepare ourselves for realization. He provides us with holy company and intense longing, breaks down the walls of our ego, and takes us through different experiences. God is both light and fire. As fire, he burns all our false hopes and attachments, and then as light, he illumines our soul and makes our life blessed.

This is the promise of the Lord in the Gita: 'My devotee never perishes.' Sri Ramakrishna confirms this promise, saying: 'God certainly provides everything for the man who totally surrenders himself to Him (896).' 'Everything depends upon His grace. To have His grace, whatever work you perform, do it with sincerity and earnest longing. Through His grace environment will be favourable and the conditions of realization will become perfect.'¹⁰ 

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3. Matthew, 7.7.
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What Is Reality?

Swami Nityasthananda

THE concept of reality varies from one school of philosophy to the other. Most logical disputes between different schools of philosophy arise from differences in this concept. In this article, however, we shall keep these philosophical polemics aside and try to investigate the nature of reality from our ordinary practical perspective.

Let us define reality as that which impinges upon our consciousness, that which makes an impact on us, or that which forces us to perceive and experience. We take external objects to be real, for they stimulate our senses and compel us to perceive them. Saints remind us that God is more real than anything else, and we may also have a strong philosophical conviction about the truth of this fact. Still, our mundane activities, problems, emotions, and ideologies become so real for us that they draw all our attention, in spite of ourselves. This hard truth reminds us of an important statement by Swami Yatiswarananda: ‘Whatever we take to be real for the time being affects our whole personality, thoughts, emotions, and actions. Our whole being responds to this reality.’¹

Incisive analysis reveals that the subtle is more real than the gross. Say, we are listening to an eloquent speech. The gross sound of the speech makes an impact on our sense organs, the ears. But that sound recedes into the background as we get engrossed in the ideas expressed in the speech. Now the subtle ideas become more real than the gross sound. The same occurs when our awareness of reading a book and the letters on its pages is replaced by the ideas it contains. In music too, it is the feeling inspired by a work that becomes more real than the sound of the music itself as we get engrossed in the piece. Similarly, sweetness is more real than the sweetmeat; and the utility of a table,

an abstract idea, is more real than the table itself. Again, though the physical beauty of individuals enchants us, the abstract concept of beauty goes beyond the physical form, which turns repulsive when the spirit departs from it.

How real are the physical objects that we perceive through our senses? Do we perceive the objects or only certain sensory qualities related to them? Apart from the qualities perceived by the senses, do we know anything about the object? Here is a table made of wood. We see its colour and shape, hear its sound by striking it; it is hard to touch and has some smell as well. Now, do we know any bit of the table apart from the above qualities? These qualities, after all, are more related to the senses than to the object itself. Colours are nothing but light energy with different frequencies of vibration; the mind perceives these vibrations as colour. Sound also is nothing but vibrations set up in the air, which energy is perceived as sound by the mind. When we touch an object, there is transaction of energy between subatomic particles of the hand and the table; this gives us the feeling of its hardness. Even the subatomic particles are nothing but packets of energy, as physicists tell us. Perhaps, there are only different kinds of energies surrounding us, which impinge upon our senses and give rise to certain sense impressions, which we recognize as external objects.

Sense impressions, again, are nothing but ideas in the mind—*citta vṛttis* or mental modifications—and these are the only things known to us; the object in itself remains unknown. Our knowledge of the outside world is nothing other than these mental modifications, which are perceived by the witnessing self (*sākṣi-caitanya*), the real seer. The so-called real entities of the objective world are, therefore, only subtle mental ideations and their reality

cannot be verified independent of our senses.

‘*Mano-drśyam-idam dvaitam yat-kiñca-sacar-ācaram*. This duality, in the form of movable and immovable objects (of the world), is but a mental perception,’ says a popular Sanskrit saying. Albert Einstein echoes this thought when he says:

Physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world. In our endeavor to understand reality we are somewhat like a man trying to understand the mechanism of a closed watch. He sees the face and the moving hands, even hears its ticking, but he has no way of opening the case. If he is ingenious he may form some picture of a mechanism which could be responsible for all the things he observes, but he may never be quite sure his picture is the only one which could explain his observations. He will never be able to compare his picture with the real mechanism and he cannot even imagine the possibility of the meaning of such comparison.²

We find an extreme form of idealism in the *Yoga-vasishtha Ramayana* where it is said, ‘*Samastam kalpanā-mātram-idam*. All this here is mere thought.’ Further, ‘*Satyam prthvyādi-cittaṣṭham na bahiṣṭham kadācana*. Truly, the earth and other (objects) exist in the mind, never outside.’³

We see that gross objects of the phenomenal world—which reality is granted by us—appear less real when put to rigorous rational analysis, being reduced to mere ideas. Now the ideas appear to be more real than the objects they represent. But who is experiencing these ideas and externalizing them as physical objects? Who is the inner subject or the witnessing agent, without whom all this vast knowledge of the objective world could not have existed at all?

When we turn back and focus our attention on the inner subjective side of experience, we enter into the realm of consciousness, which is more real than the mental impressions themselves—in fact, it is the only real thing in the universe. We cannot deny consciousness, because it is due to consciousness that all other things are manifested. If we choose to deny everything by denying consciousness, then

the denial itself gets denied too. Therefore, we have to accept some conscious element underlying the subject. Sri Shankaracharya says:

Asti kaścit svayam nityam-aham-pratyaya-lambanaḥ; Avasthā-traya-sākṣī san-pañca-kośa-vilakṣaṇaḥ.

There is some entity that is self-established (or independent), eternal, the locus of I-consciousness, witness of the three states of waking, dream, and deep-sleep, and distinct from the five (bodily) sheaths—physical, vital, mental, intellectual, and blissful.⁴

As Swami Vivekananda puts it: ‘He [the divine consciousness] is the Eternal Subject of everything. I am subject of this chair; I see the chair; so God is the Eternal Subject of my soul.’⁵

If the subject is essentially consciousness, what about the objects it apprehends? If they were other than consciousness, they would be outside the purview of consciousness and would thus remain eternally unknown to us. That is why the *Yogavasishtha* says:

Bodhābuddham yad-vastu bodha eva tad-ucyate; Nābodham buddhyate bodho vairūpyāt-tena nānyata.

The object known by *consciousness* is declared to be *consciousness*. Consciousness does not know the unconscious, for they are (veritable) opposites. Therefore there is nothing other than consciousness.⁶

There is one universal consciousness at the back of every mental and physical phenomenon. It can be compared to the infinite ocean with innumerable waves. All phenomenal entities of this universe—humans, animals, material objects, and mental and physical energies—are like different waves in this ocean. They are all different manifestations of one universal consciousness. The *Cbhandogya Upanishad* says, ‘*Vācārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam mṛttiketyeva satyam*. In words or speech alone do modifications (of substance) originate and exist. In reality, modifications are mere names; (just as) clay alone is the reality (behind earthen objects).’⁷

Clay can be moulded into different objects

having different forms and names. These forms and names have no existence independent of the clay. Whatever may be the variations in shape, clay objects are nothing but clay. When different objects are shaped out of clay, the clay does not lose its essential nature, 'clay-ness'; it is not transformed into something else. When water rises up in waves, it remains water all the same. Similarly, the universal consciousness retains its nature even when it is manifested as the visible universe.

The ocean has huge waves as well as small ones, and bubbles too. But all these are different forms of water alone. Similarly, in the ocean of consciousness there are such huge and powerful waves as Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, and other divine personalities. By worshipping them and following the ideal they show in their lives, we try to realize our own divine nature, that is consciousness. Worship, prayer, japa, and meditation are the means to this realization.

Thus, consciousness is underlying every phenomenon—physical, mental, and spiritual. It appears as gross material objects to the physical senses; as different forms of energy in the sophisticated instruments designed by scientists; as mental modifications to the introspective mind; as divine manifestation in times of spiritual ascent, and when all seeing and perceiving stops, it remains in its pristine purity. 'Consciousness is the totality beyond space-time, what may in essence be the real "I". We have come to know that consciousness and energy are one; that all space-time is constructed by consciousness; that our normal perception of reality is a composite of an indefinite number of universes in which we coexist; and that what [*sic*] we perceive as ourselves is only the localized projection of the totality of our true selves.'⁸

According to Swami Vivekananda: 'Time, space, and causation are like the glass through which the Absolute [universal divine consciousness] is seen, and when It is seen on the lower side, It appears as the universe.'⁹ Swamiji calls this 'glass' maya, which binds humans with its various manifestations. Covered by this veil, humans see themselves

as individuals and the phenomenal world as different from themselves. As the veil becomes thinner and thinner, more and more does one identify oneself with the Divine, and more and more does one also see the external world as divine. Swamiji says: 'Every human personality may be compared to a glass globe. There is the same pure white light—an emission of the divine Being—in the centre of each, but the glass being of different colours and thickness, the rays assume diverse aspects in the transmission. The equality and beauty of each central flame is the same, and the apparent inequality is only in the imperfection of the temporal instrument of its expression. As we rise higher and higher in the scale of being, the medium becomes more and more translucent' (4.191).

Is there actually a veil? Is there a glass globe separating us from Reality? Are there different worlds of manifestation? According to Swamiji: 'There are no such realities as a physical world, a mental world, a spiritual world. Whatever is, is one. Let us say, it is a sort of tapering existence; the thickest part is here, it tapers and becomes finer and finer. The finest is what we call spirit; the grossest, the body. And just as it is here in [the] microcosm, it is exactly the same in the macrocosm. The universe of ours is exactly like that; it is the gross external thickness, and it tapers into something finer and finer until it becomes God' (2.16).



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Understanding Adhyāsa

Swami Atmapriyananda

VOLUME THREE of the *Cultural Heritage of India*, published by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, contains a remarkable paper by Professor Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya titled ‘The Advaita and Its Spiritual Significance’. As the title of the paper indicates, the approach to Advaita presented in it is *not* intellectual; hence the paper is neither pedantic nor analytical. Nor is the paper written to stimulate or satisfy the philosopher’s appetite for abstruse philosophical discussion. Whetting the curiosity of that class of voracious readers and listeners who have an insatiable appetite for what Swami Vivekananda calls ‘intellectual opium-eating’ is the job of one who is devoted only to *śravaṇa*, intellectual study. Providing satisfaction or stimulation to the intellect of a class of aspirants who are seriously interested in absorbing the truths of philosophy is the job of a philosopher who is devoted to *manana*, deep reflection. But, elevating the minds and hearts of a few committed seekers in whom dwells the passion to realize the Truth, to directly intuit Reality, in lesser or greater measure, is the work of a very different class of philosophers—those who are devoted to *nididhyāsana*, absorption in Truth through meditative awareness. Prof. Bhattacharyya, I believe, belongs to this class of philosophers, whose appeal directly strikes a chord in the heart of the reader when the latter is a genuine seeker of Truth and not one endowed with mere intellectual curiosity, however deep and noble. While *śravaṇa* and *manana* occur at the levels of the *prāṇamaya ātman* (vital self) and *manomaya ātman* (mental self), *nididhyāsana* is an activity of the *vijñānamaya ātman* (intellect-self). While participation of the mind (*manas*) is sufficient for *śravaṇa* and *manana*, *nididhyāsana* can hap-

pen only if the heart (*hṛdaya*, *dhī*, or *buddhi*, the higher intuitive faculty) participates. *Nididhyāsana* becomes profound and fruitful when the mind and the heart unite, that is, when the mind is merged into the heart.¹ I believe that Prof. Bhattacharyya’s paper is born of *nididhyāsana* rather than mere *manana*. Hence, this paper should not be studied through the analytical mind, but rather through the *dhī* or *vijñānamaya ātman* in which the *manas* or *manomaya ātman* is merged; then the result will be more like a spiritual journey than a mere philosophical exercise. Every wave of thought delineated in Prof. Bhattacharyya’s paper is an invitation to dive into deeper regions within and a challenge to understand the Advaitic truth through a steadily deepening awareness. Most of Prof. Bhattacharyya’s other papers and writings belong, perhaps, to the same category. One reason why people complain about their being too complicated and difficult to access may be that they try to grapple with them through the analytical mind rather than through the heart.

Some of the vital tenets of the Advaita philosophy, as propounded by Acharya Shankara through his *bhāṣyas* (commentaries) on the *prasthāna traya* (Upanishads, Bhagavadgita, and *Brahma Sutra*) are the following:

- Brahman (describable approximately as Absolute Existence, *sat*, Absolute Awareness or Consciousness, *cit*, and Absolute Bliss, *ānanda*) is the only Reality—*brahmaiva satyam*;
- That which is observed or seen—that is, the object—is unreal or false: *dr̥śyatva* is *mithyātva*;
- Maya is neither real nor unreal—*sannapy-asannahi*, neither *sat* nor *asat*;
- Ishvara is Brahman in reference to maya;
- Moksha or liberation is attained through

knowledge of Brahman (*brahma-jñāna*), wherein the individual realizes his or her identity with Brahman, *brahmātmaikya*.

Prof. Bhattacharyya contends that each of these vital tenets of Advaita philosophy may be regarded as the elaboration of, and follow directly from, the *one single notion of illusoriness of the individual self* (mithyātva of the jiva considered as a separate individual). This insightful paper needs to be carefully studied and assimilated by serious students of Vedanta who are also spiritual seekers. What is attempted below is a rather imperfect sketch of some aspects of this masterly exposition.

Adhyāsa, Superimposition

The key to understanding the above-mentioned vital tenets of Advaita as flowing from the one single notion of illusoriness of the individual self is the concept of *adhyāsa* or superimposition. We should remember that *adhyāsa* is *not* ‘a theory to explain individuation of the self’, but a ‘statement of facts’, as Swami Vivekananda said—‘what we are and what we see around us’. In the words of Acharya Shankara, it is natural for persons—be they ignorant or so-called learned—to act irrationally, their behaviour sometimes being no different from animals in several respects, *naisargiko’yaṁ lokavyavahāraḥ*. If *adhyāsa* were a theory to explain our present state of existence, the why and how of *adhyāsa* would be natural subjects of inquiry. Individuation itself is, however, the result of *adhyāsa*, and causality a notion that follows individuation; so it is illogical to ask of the why and how of *adhyāsa*—which must needs have preceded individuation and hence causality. The spiritual experience of becoming aware, even vaguely, of *adhyāsa* as a principle of individuation that has ‘somehow’ mixed up truth and falsehood—*satyānrte mithunīkṛtya*—is accompanied by a sense of profound wonder, *āścarya*. If even a psychological awareness of *adhyāsa* gives rise to a sense of wonder about how one could at all come to think of oneself as an individual in the first place, how much more would be the wonder of the person of realization who has actually—directly and

intuitively, *sākṣāt aparokṣāt*—perceived the unreality of the individual self. The *Ashtavakra Samhita* describes the state of such realization and wonder in sublime poetry:

*Aho nirañjanaḥ śānto bodho’haṁ prakṛteḥ paraḥ;
Etāvantaṁ-ahaṁ kālaṁ mohenaiva viḍambitaḥ.*

Oh, I am spotless, tranquil, Pure Consciousness, and beyond Nature. All this time I have been merely duped by illusion.

*Aho vikalpitaṁ viśvaṁ-ajñānān-mayi bhasate;
Rūpyaṁ śuktau phaṇī rajjau vāri sūryakare yathā.*

Oh, the universe appears in me, conceived through ignorance, just as silver appears in mother of pearl, a snake in a rope, and water in the sunbeam.

*Aho ahaṁ namo mahyaṁ vināśo yasya nāsti me;
Brahmādi-stamba-paryantaṁ jagat-nāśe’pi tiṣṭhataḥ.*

Wonderful am I! Adoration to myself [in the absolute sense] who knows no decay and survives even the destruction of the world, from Brahma down to a clump of grass.²

The *Ashtavakra Samhita* abounds in such passages expressing the joy of Self-realization.

In this state of spiritual wonder, there is dissociation from the past; rather, the past appears to have been erased from the consciousness of the sage, who now remains in the Eternal Present that is Brahman. In this erasure, there is total disowning of the past self with which the sage had long been used to getting associated and entangled. ‘The old man is gone, gone for ever, never to come back again,’ wrote Swami Vivekananda. This ‘disowning’ of the past self, erasure of the little individual self, is accompanied by a total ‘owning’ of Brahman, which results in the welling up of the famous Upa-nishadic prayer from within the sage’s heart:

*Mā’haṁ brahma nirākuryāṁ mā mā brahma
nirākarod-anirākaraṇam-astv-anirākaraṇam me’su.*

May I not disown (deny) Brahman, may Brahman not disown (deny) me; between Brahman and myself, may there be a relationship of non-disowning (non-denial).³

'I', 'Me', and 'You'

The psychological process behind this spiritual awakening—leading to the annihilation of the illusion of the little individual self—takes the form of the real 'I', the Eternal Subject, denying the illusory 'I', which is the body-mind-senses complex (*dehātma*), as well as the 'me' or the identification with this complex (*dehātma-buddhi*).

The individual self then appears to be a sort of 'you', which is both 'me' and 'I', thus taking itself to be an objective subject. There are two illusions, as it were—of the 'I' appearing as 'you' (objective subject) and therefore also as 'me' (object), and of the 'you' appearing as 'I'. With the disappearance of the first illusion, the body-mind complex is felt as an individual illusion and is, therefore, detached from the self through disavowal of its subjectivity. The moment this happens, the body-mind complex appears to be an object, much like the world outside, from which the self is dissociated. A vague belief in the reality of this complex remains, however. The illusion, it may be called second illusion, that gives a semblance of reality to one's own body-mind complex, is no longer felt to be an individual illusion; this complex is now perceived as being part of the world outside. Thus, it is a cosmic illusion, the dissipation of which would bring the realization that not only is one's own body-mind complex an illusion, but the entire world outside is also illusory, for one's body-mind complex is now seen as only a point of reference of the macrocosm outside. The realization that the individual self, *jiva*, is illusory, gives rise to the realization that the world outside, *jagat*, is also illusory.

In Vedantic parlance, realization of the illusoriness of the individual self is the result of *tvam-padārtha-śodhana*, elucidation of the meaning of the 'thou' (in the great Upanishadic dictum *tat-tvam-asi*, 'thou art That'), while the apprehension of the illusoriness of the world outside comes from *tat-padārtha-śodhana*, elucidation of the meaning of 'That' (in the same dictum). Put positively, *tvam-padārtha-śodhana* gives rise not only to the realization of the illusoriness of the individual

self, but also to an apprehension of the Reality behind the individual—the 'fourth' state of consciousness beyond all relativity, *turiya caitanya*. Though the individual self is realized as illusory, the world outside (with one's body-mind complex as its point of reference) appears to remain, and one longs to examine the reality behind the world. This examination is called *tat-padārtha-śodhana* in Vedānta. Just as one thinks that the reality behind one's individual self is the *jīva-caitanya*, individual consciousness, which on *śodhana*, discriminative analysis, is realized as nothing but *turiya caitanya* (which is the implied meaning of 'thou', *tvam-padārtha-lakṣyārtha*), one also conceives of the Reality behind the world outside (including one's own body-mind complex, which is now felt as part of the world) as *īśvara-caitanya*, the consciousness associated with Ishvara or God, which on *śodhana* is realized to be nothing but *brahma-caitanya*, the Consciousness that is Brahman. One then realizes that there is but one indivisible, homogenous mass of Awareness or Consciousness (*akhaṇḍa-vijñāna-ghana-eka-rasa*), which is called *turiya-caitanya* from the microcosmic point of view and *brahma-caitanya* from the macrocosmic point of view, but is 'one without a second' (*ekamevādviṭīyam*), admitting of no differentiation whatsoever (*neha nānā'sti kiñcana*).

Avidyā and Maya

Acharya Shankara says that *adhyāsa*—that is, mistaking the Self for the non-Self and vice versa—is *avidyā*, ignorance. Owing to this *avidyā* one mistakes oneself for an individual. And the individual, being the outcome of *adhyāsa*, cannot conceive of the original cause of *adhyāsa*. This mistaken knowledge is the natural and spontaneous (*naisargika*) experience of all, dictating all mundane behaviour (*loka-vyavahāra*)—from that of Brahma (that is, Prajapati) down to that of the ant (*ābrahma-pipīlikā-paryanta*). Since this *avidyā* is naturally and directly experienced by all, it is only the direct and immediate experience (*sākṣāt aparokṣa*) of pure Consciousness (*śuddha-caitanya*) that can mitigate

Felling the World Tree

O Kiriti (Arjuna), there will arise in your mind a doubt—whether there exists any means by which such a big tree could be uprooted—a tree whose top branches have reached the very realm of Brahma, whose root is grounded in the formless Brahman at the top, whose lower branches have pierced the earth, and whose middle branches form the human order. Do not harbour any such doubt. Cutting down this tree hardly requires work. Is it necessary to (physically) drive out (imaginary) goblins in order to remove children’s fright? Does pulling down the fortified city of the Gandharvas (a fanciful creation in the sky) or breaking the horns of a hare, or plucking a flower from the sky involve any labour? O Warrior, know this tree of the world to be an unreality (much like the above objects). Where then is there any fear in destroying it? Describing the branches and roots (of the world tree) is like filling the house of a barren woman with progeny. ... Had it not been so, and had the roots of the tree been real, who could ever uproot it? Can the sky ever be made to disappear by merely puffing at it? ... This unreal tree keeps growing endlessly on account of one’s ignorance. Therefore, O Kiriti, cleave it with the weapon of knowledge of the Supreme Self. The greater use you make of remedies other than the knowledge of the Supreme Self, the more entangled you will be in the meshes of the tree,

and there will be no end to your wanderings up and down its branches. ... It is sheer waste of energy trying to collect sticks to kill an illusory serpent. It is like getting drowned in a stream while trying to procure a raft to cross a mirage. ... The only remedy for a wound caused in a dream is to awaken. Similarly, O Dhananjaya, the axe of knowledge is the only means to cutting down the root that is ignorance. Secure the strength of asceticism needed to wield this axe. Discard the triad of [dogmatic] religion, riches, and passion. Casting off attachment to the body, hold this axe in the grip of inward perception, rubbing the blade on the whetstone of discrimination, sharpening it with the thought ‘I am Brahman’, and polishing it with the realization of the Self, one should test it with a firm resolve. When the axe has been balanced through contemplation, and the weapon and its wielder have become one, then none can resist its strike. This axe of knowledge of the Supreme Self, with its sharp edge of non-dualism, will remove the tree of worldly existence, much as the autumn breeze clears the sky of clouds, the rising sun eliminates darkness, or awakening does away with dreams. Thus, O Mighty Warrior, should the Ashwattha tree that this world is be felled with the weapon of knowledge.

—Adapted from Jnanadeva, *Jnaneshwari*, 210–266,
after R K Bhagwat’s translation

this *avidyā*. In a sense, *aparokṣa anubhūti*, non-mediate experience (of Brahman), is a *sine qua non* for the eradication of *avidyā*, since the experience of *avidyā* itself is *aparokṣa*—natural, spontaneous, and immediate! This can be used as an argument to prove the *svayam-prakāśatva* (self-revelation) of pure Being or the Atman: when even the false individual, the *jīva*, is known to itself directly and not through any means of knowledge, being the natural experience of every being, it is needless to say that pure Being or Reality is self-revealed (*svayam-prakāśa*) and does not require any means of knowledge to establish its existence. The Shastras teach of the reality of the Atman by merely eliminating the

distinctions concocted in it by *avidyā*; there is no other way for doing this.

Adhyāsa and the appearance of the world are interdependent. The appearance of the one with the appearance of the other, and the disappearance of the one with the disappearance of the other, confirms the relationship of cause and effect between the two. This concomitance proves that the apprehension of the world is the effect of *avidyā* or *adhyāsa*, because the world exists only as long as *avidyā* exists. Besides, when this false understanding, mistaking the Self for the non-Self and vice versa, is sublated by true knowledge—which is the direct intuitive awareness: ‘I am Brahman, *aham*

brahmāsmi—then duality is not perceived at all. Along with such awareness comes the experience of the Atman or Brahman as ‘one without a second’, and no world separate from this one indivisible Consciousness (*akhaṇḍa-caitanya*) is perceived.

The individualized consciousness that makes one feel the ‘me’ to be illusory further leads one to the awareness that objectivity itself is illusory, for the ‘me’ is nothing but a prototype of objectivity. What Prof. Bhattacharyya calls ‘me’ in his paper is, in Vedantic parlance, the *upahita-caitanya* (limited consciousness), and the ‘I’ that he refers to is *anupahita-caitanya* (consciousness not limited by adjuncts or *upādhis*). The *upahita-caitanya* is not merely *anupahita-caitanya* plus *upādhi*, it has ‘something’ (*yatkiñcit*) else, a cohesive element between the two, whose real nature (*svarūpa*) is indescribable (*anirvacanīya*). The real ‘I’, imagining itself to be an individual—being identified with the *upādhi* of body-mind-senses complex—sees the world outside and asks for the cause behind the appearance of the world. Not knowing that it is the real ‘I’ (pure Consciousness) alone that gives reality to the world outside, it posits another substratum behind the world which, being identified with a cosmic *upādhi*, creates the world, calling this cosmic *upahita-caitanya* Ishvara. The *anirvacanīya yatkiñcit*, when seen from the individual viewpoint, is called *avidyā*, while its cosmic counterpart is called *maya*. Acharya Shankara clearly states that *maya* is not a *sadvastu*, real object, though it appears to be so to the non-discriminating mind.⁴ *Maya*, therefore, cannot be characterized as either real or unreal. Shankara’s poetic description of the ‘wonder’ that is *maya* in his amazingly lucid and very popular text *Vivekachudamani* is worth recalling:

*Sannāpy-asannāpy-ubhayātmikā no
bhinnāpy-abhinnāpy-ubhayātmikā no;
Sāṅgāpy-anaṅgā hyubhayātmikā no
mahādbhutānirvacanīya rūpā.*

She (*maya*) is neither existent nor non-existent nor partaking of both characters; neither same nor different nor both; neither composed of parts nor an indivisible whole nor both. She

is most wonderful and cannot be described in words.⁵


The Vedantic equations, therefore, would read as follows:

The Individual (microcosm—*vyāṣṭi*) · *anupahita-caitanya* (Atman) + *vyāṣṭi upādhi* (the *dehātmā* complex) + *vyāṣṭi yatkiñcit (avidyā)* = *vyāṣṭi upahita-caitanya* (jiva).

If x be the *anupahita-caitanya*, y the *vyāṣṭi upādhi*, and $f(x,y)$, a non-linear function of x and y , be *avidyā* (born of *itaretara adhyāsa*, mutual superimposition, of x and y —what Shankara would call *satyāṅṛta-mithuna*, the coupling of truth and falsity), then the equation could be symbolically written as: $jiva = x + y + f(x,y)$

The Collective (macrocosm—*samaṣṭi*) · *anupahita-caitanya* (Brahman) + *samaṣṭi upādhi* (*jagat-prapañca*, the world) + *samaṣṭi yatkiñcit (maya)* = *samaṣṭi upahita-caitanya* (Ishvara).

If X be the *anupahita-caitanya*, Y the *samaṣṭi upādhi*, and $F(X,Y)$, a non-linear function of X and Y , be *maya*, then the equation may be written as: $Ishvara = X + Y + F(X,Y)$

With the disappearance of *avidyā*, the jiva is divested of its *vyāṣṭi upādhi*, which is responsible for the feeling of individuality. *Anupahita-caitanya*, pure Consciousness alone, then remains. The jiva denuded of *avidyā* (that is, the Atman) realizes its identity with Ishvara divested of *maya* (that is, Brahman). The famous Vedantic identity *ayam-ātmā-brahma*, this Atman is Brahman, stands established. 

References

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3. *Kena Upanishad*, *śānti-pāṭha* (invocation).
4. Acharya Shankara’s commentary on the *Manḍukya Karika*, 2.31, 4.58. See *Eight Upaniṣads*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), 255–6, 371–2.
5. *Vivekachudamani*, v. 109. See *Vivekacūdāmaṇi*, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978), 39.

Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta

Pravrajika Brahmaprana

WANDERING mendicants in India greet each other: ‘*Om*. Is your vision clear?’ ‘*Om*’ is a salutation to the indwelling divinity, or Atman, within all beings. ‘Is your vision clear?’ is a sober reminder: Are we seeing the world as it truly is or, rather, as it appears to be? The vision that comes from spiritual insight completely transforms our perception of *who* we are, *what* this world is, and what our *relationship* to it is. Therefore, one who has such insight is known in Sanskrit as a *ṛṣi*, or ‘seer’.

What is the correct vision of reality? The Upanishads say that Brahman, the ultimate reality, is pure consciousness (*prajñānam brahma*).¹ But, so long as this empirical world of multiplicity exists for us, consciousness remains a mere philosophical concept with different categories.

Categories of Consciousness

According to Advaita Vedanta, these different categories of consciousness are classified as absolute consciousness (*brahma-caitanya*), cosmic consciousness (*īśvara-caitanya*), individual consciousness (*jīva-caitanya*), and indwelling consciousness (*sākṣi-caitanya*). However, all these distinctions are due to limiting adjuncts (*upādhis*) and are not intrinsic to the true nature of consciousness, which is by itself one and non-dual. Advaita Vedanta says that there is a substratum of this universe, even finer than energy (*prāṇa*), called *brahma-caitanya*. The very nature of this substratum is *sat-cit-ānanda*: absolute existence (*sat*), pure consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*). In other words, pure being is Self-aware and is of the nature of pure consciousness and bliss, or ‘loving consciousness’.

The natural question that arises is: How did absolute consciousness—undivided, unmoved,

and unchanging—become this world of multiplicity and change? The great seer and philosopher Shankaracharya (c. 686–718 CE) resolved this paradox with his theory of superimposition, *vivarta-vāda*. From the ultimate standpoint, absolute consciousness did not become this world; it only *appears* to have done so. Shankara gave the classic example of the snake and the rope: We see a snake on the road at night, but as we approach the snake and flash a torch on it, we realize that it is actually a rope. This snake-universe is a superimposition upon the rope-Brahman. There is no more causal relationship between this world-appearance and Brahman than there is between the snake and the rope. However, the universe has no existence apart from Brahman, just as the snake has no existence apart from the rope.

Since it is possible for a rope to be mistaken for a snake, it is also possible for something to apparently exist without being real. Advaita Vedanta states that this world *is* and *is not*. By *is not*, it is not suggested that the world is an illusion without a basis, a shadow without substance, or a void. It means that the world as it *appears* to us is unreal because this world-appearance has no *absolute* existence. But for a *ṛṣi* whose vision is clear, the world is ever real because it is, essentially, nothing less than Brahman mistaken as a world of matter. This cosmic superimposition of the unreal on the real is due to *maya*, which literally means ‘that which measures the immeasurable’. To show its twin faculty of concealing the reality and projecting the apparent, *maya* is often compared to a veil, a cloud, or a screen, as well as a magician’s trick.

Advaita Vedanta is not mere philosophical speculation or theory; it has direct experience as its basis as well as ultimate proof. To lift the veil of *maya*, Advaita Vedanta exhorts the spiritual seeker to

take the testimony of the scriptures (Vedas) and illumined souls, use reason, reflection, and meditation, and attain direct experience. These are the compasses, maps, and sails needed to steer successfully to the highest union with Brahman. One must transcend the effects of maya in order to know the nature of its cause.

How does a knower of Brahman perceive this world-appearance which *is* and *is not*? Swami Shivananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, one day disclosed the answer to his attendant, who noticed how the swami reverently saluted all who entered his room, regardless of their social position or spiritual stature. 'When somebody approaches me,' the swami conceded, 'first of all I see that particular effulgent form of God through which He reveals Himself in that particular personality. The persons themselves appear indistinctly like shadowy beings, while the divine aspect itself appears vivid and living. That's why I make my obeisance. The divine forms disappear after my salutation, and then only can I see the human figures distinctly and recognize them as well.'² One day, Swami Shivananda even saluted a cat, explaining afterwards to his attendant that he first saw Brahman as pure consciousness at play in all forms, including the cat's, and then recognized the difference as only in name (293).

This level of realization stems from a great Upanishadic truth: 'From pure consciousness, which is of the nature of absolute bliss, all beings arise, by it are they sustained, and it they re-enter at death.'³ For those of us who possess ordinary human consciousness, however, only the world-appearance of name and form is manifest to the mind and senses. In our ignorance, we see the cat, not Brahman.

The second type of consciousness in Advaita Vedanta is called *īśvara-caitanya*, or Brahman united with maya as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of this universe. With the purpose of explaining what *īśvara-caitanya* is, Brahman may be called the ultimate cause of the universe because, due to maya, the world-appearance is superimposed upon it. But Brahman can neither transform itself into the world nor create it, since that which is

absolute reality, by definition, must transcend action and change. Therefore, Vedanta introduces the creative principle of Ishvara—Brahman united with maya—to explain the process of this universe's creation, preservation, and dissolution, which is without beginning and without end. Ishvara is God with attributes. The personal God, according to Swami Vivekananda, is the highest reading of the Absolute by the human mind.

'Are there two Gods then,' we may ask, 'one absolute and one personal?' 'No,' Vedanta says, 'Brahman appears as Ishvara when viewed through maya.' 'But,' we persist, 'what then is the difference between Ishvara and an ordinary human being?' According to Vedanta, Ishvara is the wielder of maya—all-free, all-powerful, and all-knowing—whereas human beings are subject to maya because their freedom, power, and knowledge are limited. Human beings can become one with Ishvara, but they can never be individually the same as Ishvara.

This brings us to the third type of consciousness in Vedanta: human consciousness, or *jīva-caitanya*. The superimposition of the ego-idea upon pure consciousness is the individual's first plunge into the whirlpool of maya. Vedanta says that the lie of separateness—the claim that 'I am I (the lower I)'—is the initial act that produces the chain reaction of further superimposition and entanglement. Considering ourselves 'individuals' implies considering everything as 'individual'. This attitude inexorably superimposes a world of multiplicity upon the one, undivided reality.

Initially, the ego-idea identifies itself with the body and mind, and with their attributes and actions. Instinctively we say: 'I am young,' 'I am short,' or 'I am talking'. As the ego-idea reaches further out to claim external objects and conditions as its own, we find ourselves thinking and saying such things as: 'I am an American,' or 'This property is mine'. As our superimpositions multiply, so do our extraordinary personal claims, such as 'We are sending troops to the Balkans,' or 'I carry health insurance'. Thus, the human ego continues to enlarge itself until it becomes identified with every known object

in its universe, while the higher Self remains the detached witness to all these foolish shenanigans. At the same time, the Self makes them all possible by providing the mind with the light of consciousness, without which maya could not exist. In short, it is due to maya that we become identified with a psychophysical being—the shadow of our real Self.

‘Who am I?’ we may then ask. ‘What is my real nature? Like the world around me, am I a mixture of Brahman and maya—the real and the apparent, divine and human consciousness, Atman and *jīva-caitanya*?’ A passage in the *Mundaka Upanishad* describes the relationship of our true Self with the empirical self (*jīva-caitanya*):

Like two birds of golden plumage, inseparable companions, the individual self and the immortal Self are perched on the branches of the self-same tree. The former tastes of the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree; the latter, tasting of neither, calmly observes.

The individual self, deluded by forgetfulness of his identity with the divine Self, bewildered by his ego, grieves and is sad. But when he recognizes the worshipful Lord as his own true Self, and beholds His glory, he grieves no more.⁴

The state of one’s spiritual development does not matter; Vedanta upholds the real nature of every human being as the luminous Self, which is associated with the mind as the onlooker, or witness (*sākṣi-caitanya*).

This brings us to the fourth type of consciousness in Advaita Vedanta, *sākṣi-caitanya*. The witness-self transcends the changing states of the mind, neither suffering nor enjoying the mental and physical conditions of human existence. After realizing the witness-self, an aspirant returns to normal consciousness with a transformed mind. Such a soul perceives itself and the universe through a mind composed of finer matter. Like a sheet of glass, through which sunlight can pass unobstructed, the mind in this state allows the light of consciousness to reach the body and its organs unimpeded. As the witness, one perceives one’s Self to be distinct from the body and mind, which are clearly

Adoring Consciousness

प्रातः स्मरामि हृदि संस्फुरदात्मतत्त्वं सच्चित्सुखं परमहंसगतिं तुरीयम् ।
यत्स्वप्नजागरसुषुप्तमवैति नित्यं तद्ब्रह्म निष्कलमहं न च भूतसङ्घः ॥

At daybreak I remember the Self—Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss; the transcendental refuge of the renouncers—that bubbles up in the heart. That impartite Brahman (Self)—the eternal witness of the states of awakening, dream, and deep sleep—am I, and not (a mere) aggregate of matter.

प्रातर्नमामि तमसः परमर्कवर्णं पूर्णं सनातनपदं पुरुषोत्तमाख्यम् ।
यस्मिन्निदं जगदशेषमशेषमूर्तौ रज्ज्वां भुजङ्गम इव प्रतिभासितं वै ॥

At dawn I salute the Primeval Plenitude called Purushottama—radiant as the sun and beyond all darkness—in which perfect Being the entire world is manifest like a snake in a rope.
—Shankaracharya

recognized as objects of perception. One knows, beyond doubt, that it is the self-luminous Atman that governs one’s entire psychophysical being. In the mystical language of the *Kena Upanishad*, the Self is realized as ‘the Ear of the ear, Mind of the mind, Speech of the speech ... [as] also Breath of the breath, and Eye of the eye.’⁵ This witness-self is known as the ‘inner controller’ (*antaryāmin*), and is beautifully described in the *Katha Upanishad* as the rider within a chariot-body. The charioteer is the intellect (*buddhi*), and the reins are the mind—endowed with volition and emotion.

The senses, say the wise, are the horses; the roads they travel are the mazes of desire. The wise call the Self the enjoyer, when he is united with the body, the senses, and the mind.⁶

Once the jiva identifies its real nature, the next step is to locate it. How and where does pure consciousness dwell within the body? The ancient Upanishads show us the precise location. ‘Within the city of Brahman, which is the body,’ the *Chhandogya Upanishad* discloses,

there is the heart, and within the heart, there is a little house. This house has the shape of a lotus, and within it dwells that which is to be sought after, inquired about, and realized. ... Though old age comes to the body, the lotus of the heart does

not grow old. At the death of the body, it does not die. The lotus of the heart, where Brahman exists in all his glory—that, and not the body, is the true city of Brahman.⁷

Consciousness and the Psychophysical System

Also in the Upanishads, we find the classic Vedantic model of the threefold body, or fivefold sheath, which elucidates the nature of the gross and subtle layers of consciousness that exist within our psychophysical being. Vedanta explains that every human being is comprised of three bodies: the gross, the subtle, and the causal, which are the respective mediums of experience for our waking, dream, and dreamless sleep states. The gross body (*annamaya kośa*, or ‘sheath of food’) is born; it grows, transforms, decays, and dies. The subtle and causal bodies are what reincarnate from birth to birth.

The subtle body is composed of the vital sheath (*prāṇamaya kośa*), mental sheath (*manomaya kośa*), and sheath of the intellect (*vijñānamaya kośa*). The vital sheath is the life force that operates the autonomic nervous system, thus controlling respiration (*prāṇa*), excretion (*apāna*), and digestion (*samāna*), and also various functions of the cerebro-spinal system such as exertion (*vyāna*) and growth. The vital sheath, moreover, mediates the soul’s departure from the body at the time of death (*udāna*). The *manomaya kośa* comprises the volitional, or deliberative mind, as well as the five organs of perception; whereas the *vijñānamaya kośa* (*buddhi*) is the cognitive, or determinative mind, along with the five organs of perception.

Through the *buddhi*, or cognitive mind, all other faculties of the mind, whether volitional or emotional, receive their light. However, as already mentioned, the *buddhi* simply permits the passage of the light of the witness-self (*sākṣin*) and thus appears to be self-luminous. Vedanta claims that though the *buddhi* is located in the heart within a tiny space (*ākāśa*) ‘about the size of a thumb’, the witness-self dwells even deeper within our being, within the *buddhi* itself. Therefore, the *buddhi*—

only one step away from the witness-self—is still identified with the non-Self and asserts itself as the knower and the doer within the mental and vital sheaths, and functions as the empirical self that reincarnates.⁸

Human cognition exemplifies how the various mental faculties function together within the mental and intelligence sheaths. According to Vedanta, cognition is a fourfold operation. First, the deliberative faculty of the mind (*manas*) asks: ‘What is this object?’ The memory (*citta*) attempts to recall similar objects. Then, the determinative faculty (*buddhi*) is able to ascertain: ‘It is a desk.’ Finally, the sense of egoism (*ahaṁkāra*) makes the association: ‘I am sitting at the desk.’ Throughout the cognitive process, however—whether we know it or not—the light of the Self, shining through the *buddhi* to the organs of perception, reveals everything that we experience. William M Indich, in his book *Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta*, explains: ‘In visual perception, then, Brahman intelligence reflected in mind is extended out along the medium of the organ of vision, which Advaitins claim is the nature of light (*tejas*) ... contacts an object, assumes its form, and reveals it as known.’⁹

(To be concluded)

References

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3. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 3.6.1.
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Food for All

Swami Satyamayananda

ONE day in Madras, Swami Vivekananda ‘saw the half-starved children of the fishermen working with their mothers, waist-deep in the water; tears filled his eyes, and he cried out, “O Lord, why dost Thou create these miserable creatures! I cannot bear the sight of them. How long, O Lord, how long!” Those who were in his company were overcome and shed tears.’¹

In our daily activities and interactions, we often behave in a self-centred manner. But when we see images of extreme starvation or indigence in the media, this self-centredness receives a jolt. Who can remain unmoved, seeing flies swarming over prone, reed-thin human bodies?

Throughout human history, poverty and famine have been precipitated and exacerbated by humanity’s greed, folly, and apathy—though vagaries of nature have also played a role. It is disturbing to reflect on how narrow notions of religion, race, and culture, and greed for raw materials and new markets, have sent whole societies to despair and ruin. The world is still not free from such calamitous human greed, but growing human solidarity is overcoming such crimes against humanity. International agencies, governments, non-governmental organizations, charitable institutions, and individuals worldwide are working to bring aid to the starving and the poor. The global responses to local disasters, surmounting national, cultural, religious, and linguistic boundaries, are heartening and in consonance with human nature.

The Problems of Food

Fights, riots, and even revolutions have centred on food. Again, the highest altruism also has been expressed with food. In fact, the inclination to share is seen more among the poor and downtrodden than

among the affluent. People sincerely pray, ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’ The world today is richer, saner, better educated, and more obese than it was fifty years ago. Food and drink is produced, dressed, consumed, wasted, and even destroyed in massive quantities. National and multinational corporations are bringing the latest scientific and technological know-how to producing, harvesting, storing, refining, processing, advertising, catering, and packaging food to make it freely available to anyone who can afford it. Yet amidst all this bounty, millions in this world go to bed hungry every night.

Some nations today are in the grip of over-nutrition, and scientists are alarmed that obesity is reaching epidemic proportions in some areas. The World Health Organization has declared obesity a disease. The variety of food—both traditional and modern—available to middle-class consumers everywhere is astonishing. Almost all national cuisines have stepped out of their centuries-old limits and have gone international. Sri Ramakrishna describes the human condition in the Kali Yuga as *annagata prana*, that is, human life depends on food. Swami Vivekananda wrote, ‘Did not our Master [Sri Ramakrishna] use to say, “An empty stomach is no good for religion”?’ (1.3.42). But that does not mean much eating will make one spiritual. In fact, one of the first things required of spiritual aspirants is control of the palate and gluttony. Frugality in eating does increase longevity; some would attribute this to fewer toxic free radicals damaging the body.

Food in History

The votaries of ancient civilizations dutifully worshipped various gods and goddesses presiding over earth, cloud, rain, rivers, fertility, spring, harvest, and crops. Ancient societies were mainly

Sacrificial Food

Some twelve types of *yajña* are mentioned [in the fourth chapter of the Bhagavadgita], of which five deal with bodily processes. The first of these five sacrifices is *indriya-saṁyama yajña*. In this method sense-control is regarded as the fire, and the experiences of hearing, seeing, touching, etc. are regarded as oblations poured into the fire. The second sacrifice is *viśaya-bhoga yajña*. Unlike the first method, here no attempt is made to control the senses; rather, they are allowed to come into contact with the objects of enjoyment freely. But every experience is regarded as an oblation of the object into the fire of sense organs. The third method is *ātma-saṁyama yajña*, which means bringing all activities—including those of the senses, mind and *prāṇas*—under the control of a centralized will. The heart illumined by the light of Atman is regarded as the altar, self-control is the fire burning there, and all activities are imagined to be oblations into that fire. The fourth type of sacrifice is *prāṇāyāma-yajña*. This is a method of looking upon *prāṇāyāma* as an inner sacrifice, by offering inhalation (*pūraka*) and exhalation (*recaka*) as oblations into the fire of breath-restraint (*kumbhaka*). The fifth type of bodily sacrifice is the well-known *prāṇāgni-hotra*. Here eating becomes an offering of food as oblation into the five vital airs (*prāṇa*, *apāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna* and *samāna*). It is to be practised only by those who have control over food.

—Prabuddha Bharata, 88/9 (September 1983),

agricultural and pastoral; these deities were thought to participate actively in human affairs and to partake of what was offered in sacrifice. Ancestor worship found a place in almost all religions, either as an aspect or as a central theme. Ritual offering of food and drink to departed souls on special days became an important component of religion. Hindus have long worshipped the ever-solicitous Mother Annapurna, the goddess of food, whose work is to feed every living being. She is the primordial Mother of the universe with an inexhaustible supply of food. Even the great god Shiva is shown approaching her for food.

In the Vedas one finds many lofty visions re-

garding food. Various meditations connected with food and its eater are prescribed. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* states: 'He who meditates on food as Brahman, attains the worlds which are verily full of food and full of water. He who meditates on food as Brahman gets freedom of movement as far as the range of food extends.'² A mystic meditation goes thus:

That food which comes first, is to be offered as an oblation. The first oblation that he would offer, he should offer with the mantra, '*Svaha* to *prana* (the outgoing breath)'. (Thereby) *prana* is satisfied. When *prana* becomes satisfied the eye becomes contented; when the eye becomes satisfied the sun becomes contented; when the sun is satisfied the heaven becomes contented; when heaven becomes satisfied, then, whatever is presided over by heaven and the sun becomes contented. After that is satisfied, the eater himself becomes contented with progeny, animals, edible food, physical lustre, and lustre of Vedic knowledge (5.19.1–2).

Rituals and mantras have been enjoined before, during, and after eating in Hinduism. Eating, and also drinking water, is a sacred activity and not merely a physical act of filling one's stomach. It is a *yajna* or sacrifice—the offering of oblations to deities that encompass the three planes of existence. Oblations are to be offered to the deities within the body, to their visible symbols in the universe (like the sun, moon, and so on), and to their corresponding aspects on the divine plane. But this original meaning has been largely lost over time, and such sublime conceptions got reduced to mere caricatures. Swami Vivekananda deplored this—he called it 'kitchen religion'—in no uncertain terms: 'The kitchen is their temple and Handi Bartans (cooking pots) are their Devata (object of worship). This state of things must go. The sooner it is given up the better for our religion. Let the Upanishads shine in their glory.'³

Eater, Eaten, Eating

The *Aitareya Upanishad* presents a revealing meditation on food, which we paraphrase here:

The Creator, after creating the worlds, created the protectors of the world—the gods—and subjected

them to hunger and thirst. The gods said, 'Provide an abode for us, where we can stay and eat food.' The Creator then brought them a cow, which they rejected, then a horse, which was also rejected. The Creator then brought them a man. The gods were all praise for it. 'Enter into your respective abodes,' the Creator commanded them. Agni (fire) entered speech, Aditya (the sun) entered the eyes, Vayu (air) entered the sense of smell, the god of directions, the ears. The other gods also entered into their respective functions of governing the body. The gods of hunger and thirst were left out and asked the Creator to provide them also an abode. These gods were commanded to enter the body. The Creator then deliberated, 'Let me create food for them all.' From this deliberation evolved a form. This form was food. Food turned and attempted to run away. The Creator tried to take it up with the various organs—of speech, smell, sight, hearing, touch, and mind—but failed each time. Otherwise one would have been merely satisfied by talking of, smelling, seeing, touching, hearing, or thinking of food. The Creator then tried to take food up by *apana* and succeeded. This is the devourer of food. This is the vital energy.⁴

So it is *apana* that devours food. *Apana* is one of the five functions of Prana, the life-force animating all living beings. Prana has five names according to its five main functions: *prana*, *apana*, *vyana*, *udana*, and *samana*. These regulate different functions of the body: *prana* regulates breath; *apana* regulates bowel movement and excretion; *vyana* pervades the entire body; *udana* regulates the departure from the body at death; and *samana* assimilates food and drink.

Working for food and digesting it is a principal activity of every living being. Life depends on food. Hunger and thirst are homeostatically regulated by the endocrine and neural systems, which keeps track of energy and fluid levels in the body. Any deviation from the norms awakens a desire to eat, drink, breathe hard, or do whatever is needed to restore homeostasis. There was a time when it was thought that hunger pangs felt in the stomach stimulated appetite, but neurobiologists now understand that the hypothalamus in the brain is the

regulating monitor. There are two kinds of hunger: short-term and long-term. The former is activated when the level of blood sugar falls, driving us to raise it by eating. Long-term hunger is a function of body fat levels. Fat is stored in the body and is converted to energy in times of need. When the level of body fat falls, the organism feels the urge to eat more. It is this second hunger that pays no heed to contemporary conceptions of beauty, which idealize a fat-free body. Its function is to protect the organism against future emergencies.

To the discriminating, diets are becoming passé; they see the lack of consensus among nutritionists and dietitians about the levels of fat, carbohydrate, protein, vitamins, and minerals that may be considered beneficial. Yet diet books are proliferating in the market. Obesity is blamed on genes and hormones—but not on mindless or binge eating. Such overeating is not generally responsive to internal hunger or satiety, but to such external cues as aroma, shape, colour, texture, and taste.

The abundance of food today has changed our lifestyle and, some say, has also multiplied the number of diseases from which we suffer. This in turn spurs us to search for more medical solutions. But the Upanishad says that food itself is *sarvaushadham*, medicine for all.⁵ Then again, religion is invoked in the quarrel between vegetarians and non-vegetarians; and now vegans—those who eschew even milk, cheese, and ghee as animal products—have joined the fray as well.

The Food Web

All organisms are part of a food web—a complex system of feeding relationships or food chains, of eater and eaten. To believe that humans stand at the apex of the food chain is mistaken: there is no apex in a web. Swami Vivekananda addresses this belief: 'There are people who are foolish in another way: they teach us that all these animals were created for us to kill and eat, and that this universe is for the enjoyment of men. That is all foolishness. A tiger may say, "Man was created for me," and pray, "O Lord, how wicked are these men who do not come and

place themselves before me to be eaten; they are breaking Your law.” If the world is created for us, we are also created for the world.⁶ The weaker is prey to the stronger. Every being depends on the lives of other beings. We live on other species, and others live on us, and some species even manifest cannibalistic traits. Thus, life and death are two sides of the same coin. On closer examination, the simple equation of birth, growth, and death appears complex, horrible, gruesome, and confusing. Swami Vivekananda puts it graphically: ‘Can you draw a breath without destroying thousands of lives? You live, because, millions die. Every moment of your life, every breath that you breathe, is death to thousands; every movement that you make is death to millions. Every morsel that you eat is death to millions. Why should they die? There is an old sophism that they are very low existences’ (2.112–13). The old sophism has not left us yet. Swami Vivekananda further says, ‘The physiological meaning of food is assimilation of energy from the sun. The energy has reached the plant, the plant is eaten by an animal, and the animal by man’ (1.244). This is the mighty law of nature: nothing is wasted, nothing is lost. As the saying goes, ‘One who lives by the sword dies by the sword.’ Similarly, ‘Since it [food] is eaten and it eats the creatures, therefore it is called food.’⁷ The eater is eaten, in turn; thus revolves the wheel of life and death.

Food, Body, and Mind

In the Vedic literature we find, ‘All beings that rest on the Earth are born verily from food. Besides, they live on food, and at the end, they get merged in food’ (ibid.). ‘That man, such as he is, is surely a product of the essence of food’ (2.1.1). Scientists say that when humankind discovered cooking, it put itself on evolution’s fast track. Human diet has, over thousands of years, inexorably aided genetic changes. Today, some geneticists are pushing for not only custom-made diets but also medicines tailored to one’s genetic code. This, they aver, will help eliminate many diseases. Genetic engineers are also working to produce disease-resistant animals, birds,

and crops that are unnaturally healthy.

Are humans good just for foraging-hunting-gathering-growing-storing-eating-digesting food over and over? Is a person’s life merely *udara-nimittam*, for the stomach alone? This may be true for animals, but humans can think, philosophize, dream, reach out to the infinite galaxies, create works of art, enjoy music, love intensely, build cities and spaceships, worship God, and do countless other things. Humanity truly is made to conquer nature, to transcend human limitations. A person is not merely a body filled with *prana*; to every person there are innumerable dimensions seeking expression.

The Creator endowed the human organism with sensory and motor organs and a mind, and their functions have traditionally been associated with various deities or ‘protectors’. These ‘protectors’ are also subject to hunger and thirst, but cannot take food directly. *Samana* assimilates food and passes it on to them. In a celebrated example in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, Uddalaka tells his son Shwetaketu to desist from eating for fifteen days. The boy obeys, and after a fortnight presents himself to his father. Uddalaka asks him to recite the Vedic mantras, but Shwetaketu is unable to do so, saying that they do not flash in his mind. His mental powers have waned. Uddalaka then instructs him to eat. This Shwetaketu does; then he is able to recite the mantras easily. The food that he ate became mind: ‘Of the food, O good-looking one, when it is eaten, that which is the subtle part becomes mind.’⁸

Transformation of Energy

The energy that moves from the body to the sensory and motor organs, and thence to the various levels of the mind, flows towards the intellect. As energy ascends, it becomes more subtle, interior, and pervasive.⁹ Living plants and animals die and become food; this ‘dead’ food is transmuted on being eaten. Food becomes vital and living, Prana and intelligence. The intelligence-energy moves still higher and becomes happiness, and this happiness suffuses everything. It is because of this that we

cling to existence. 'A person is associated with that energy in the mind nourished through food and divided into sixteen parts. One possessing that energy and soul, and characterized by the aggregate of body and organs is said to be a person with sixteen parts. Owing to the existence of it (energy) a person becomes a seer, a hearer, a thinker, intelligent, an agent, a knower—able to perform all actions, and on the waning of it, (this) ability is lost.'¹⁰ The Upanishad gives an analogy for the transmutation: 'Of curd when it is churned, that which is its subtle part rises upward. That becomes clarified butter. O good-looking one, in this very way, of food when it is eaten, that which is the subtle part, that rises upward, and that becomes mind.' Shankaracharya explains the actual process: 'The subtlest ingredient, having reached the heart above and entering into the fine nerves named *hita*, becomes the mind.'¹¹

Interactions of Energy

We hear of hunger of the soul, moral weakness and depravity, emotional dryness, intellectual hunger, mental turpitude, aesthetic impoverishment, failing memory, distracted or wicked senses, poor character, sadness, and depression. What is the nature of this poverty? We have seen how these levels of the personality get nourishment from food. Shankaracharya gives another definition of 'food'; and Swami Vivekananda mentions it: 'That which is gathered in is Ahara. The knowledge of the sensations, such as sound etc., is gathered in for the enjoyment of the enjoyer (self); the purification of the knowledge which gathers in the perception of the senses is the purifying of the food (Ahara).'¹² This second source of 'food' is essential for the development of one's inner dimensions. One's senses, mind, intellect, and ego interact with the faculties of other beings and things of the external world which are at a similar level of 'vibration'. One fond of food will visit restaurants or raid the refrigerator. Intelligence develops in an intellectual atmosphere; those with a well-developed intelligence seek intellectual persons and challenges. Similarly, moral persons will seek and be comfortable with moral

persons; spiritual persons will seek other spiritual persons and a spiritual atmosphere. Since the personality is dynamic, people who are highly developed in one dimension may also be attracted to those developed in another: a moral person can interact with an intellectual or an emotional person; an emotional or aesthetic person may enjoy food, science fiction, prayers, or music; a spiritual person might take pleasure in mathematics or music. Such mutual interaction helps develop and culture the personality. Thus, matter (food) sustains matter (body), life sustains life, mind sustains mind, intellect sustains intellect, and happiness sustains happiness. We nourish and enrich each other.

Poverty and Corruption

There are people who, though feeling hunger's pangs, are unwilling to eat. As constant hunger damages the power of digestion, stunts rejuvenation of tissues, and weakens the organic system, so also does hunger on the sensory, moral, emotional, aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual planes hinder the development and maturation of the person. Life becomes insipid, reduced to an empty shell-like existence. Those who confine themselves to food, drink, sleep, fear, and sex—as the saying goes—are akin to animals. Knowledge is the special characteristic of humankind; devoid of it, humans are merely animals. Swami Vivekananda says, 'That this world is created for our enjoyment is the most wicked idea that holds us down' (1.88). Again, misanthropic behaviour and selfishness arrest the organismic energies and prevent their being transmuted to higher levels. Such negative propensities also isolate people and perpetuate a state of poverty.

Eating unwholesome food, apart from causing ill health, makes us impure and ties us to a gross level. Swami Vivekananda is emphatic: 'If you go into a menagerie, you will find this demonstrated at once. You see the elephants, huge animals, but calm and gentle; and if you go towards the cages of the lions and tigers, you find them restless, showing how much difference has been made by food' (1.136). If the quality of *ahara*, food, that is taken in through

the senses is unwholesome—from such sources as television, the Internet, literature, cinema, and bad company—the personality is similarly corrupted.

All is Food


We have been discussing how life depends on food. Yet, Pavhari Baba, the saint who ate ‘air’, was alive and active. Of course, he was a yogi, and yogis have many psychic powers. But we ought to remember, ‘No mortal lives by *prana* or *apana*; but all live by something else on which these two depend.’¹³

Food becomes body, becomes life, becomes the senses, becomes mind, becomes intelligence, becomes bliss; thus has food gross and subtle aspects—and so has the eater. Not only is everything in creation food—if it is poison to one it is food to another—but also from food is everything born. One who knows this metaphysical secret of food knows the secret of the universe. ‘Just as it is here in [the] microcosm, it is exactly the same in the macrocosm. The universe of ours is exactly like that; it is the gross external thickness, and it tapers into something finer and finer until it becomes God.’¹⁴ Why approach metaphysics through food? Well, what is better-known than food? The sages knew it and declared: ‘Food, vital force, eye, ear, mind, speech—these are the aids to the knowledge of Brahman’—these are doors to the realization of Brahman.¹⁵

We can speak of still another aspect of energy derived from food. The energy that comes from digestion and metabolism—which are subconscious activities—rises to the conscious plane and culminates in happiness. But this energy is mundane still. As one’s propensity towards enjoyment of sense-objects is restrained, the energy assimilated as food is converted into *ojas*, which is higher intuition, memory, and spiritual power. Swami Vivekananda says, ‘The Yogis claim that of all the energies that are in the human body the highest is what they call “Ojas”.’¹⁶ *Ojas* brings one the power to wash away the last traces of one’s primordial past and become a superhuman. One can, with such a purified mind, penetrate the mysteries of creation (food) and the Creator.

Food has two aspects: the known and the un-

known. The first we have been discussing till now. The *Mundaka Upanishad* explains the second: ‘Through knowledge, Brahman increases in size. From that is born food (the unmanifested). From food evolves Prana (Hiranyagarbha); (thence the cosmic) mind; (thence) the five elements; (thence) the worlds; (thence) the immortality that is in *kar-mas*.’¹⁷ Hence from the ‘unknown’ food has evolved the ‘known’ food.

This knowledge will lead us beyond the food on our plate and in our stomach to the infinite Reality which is our real nature. The shloka from the Bhagavadgita which is chanted before meals is an elevating reminder: ‘Brahman is the offering, Brahman is the oblation; it is Brahman who offers the oblation into the fire of Brahman. One who sees Brahman in all action attains Brahman.’¹⁸ 

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The Mahāvākyas: Their Role in Sadhana

Prof. Debabrata Sen Sharma

IT is well known that the *mahāvākyas*, ‘great (Vedic) dicta’, embody the quintessence of the spiritual wisdom of Vedic seers. The Vedas, technically called Shruti (revealed scripture), are universally recognized as the fountainhead of spiritual thought of ancient India. It consists of two distinct parts that capture the sublime spiritual experiences of seers and sages, rishis and munis: the Samhita and the Upanishad.

The rishis came face to face with the Supreme Truth (*parama satya*) by means of their inner eye of wisdom (*ārṣa-cakṣu*). The Vedic Samhitas are the spontaneous outpourings of their souls as a result of this experience. Their utterances, technically called mantras, express the Supreme Truth in symbolic language, for ordinary language is too inadequate to convey these deeply mystical experiences. The disciples of the rishis who heard these mantras directly from the lips of the seers, however, had no difficulty in grasping the import as revealed by their innate denotative power (*vākśakti*). Others, who did not have the privilege of hearing the mantras directly from the seers, had to resort to the study of Vedāṅgas, ancillary texts, to decipher their meaning.

Spiritual Pragmatism of the Upanishads

The Upanishads, on the other hand, are constrained by this limitation to a much lesser extent, though they also enshrine the deep spiritual experiences of the rishis and munis, authenticated by their insight into the mystical utterances of the Samhitas. The Upanishadic sages often articulated their rich spiritual knowledge in intellectual terms, in response to queries from disciples and spiritual seekers. As we study the dialogues of the rishis and their disciples, we notice two striking characteristics of Upanishadic thought.

First, the Upanishadic sages do not appear to make any effort to establish their spiritual findings on logical grounds, unlike the later treatises of different schools of Indian philosophy. Moreover, they go to the extent of declaring that the highest spiritual wisdom cannot be obtained by following the path of logical argumentation, *na iṣā tarkeṇa matirāpaneyā*.¹ Instead, it is revealed to those seekers of spiritual truth who have the aspiration to receive it and have also developed the capacity to grasp and hold the revelation (1.2.23).

The second salient characteristic of the Upanishadic sayings is their pragmatic approach—their close connection with the practical side of the spiritual quest, their emphasis on spiritual discipline, sadhana. Numerous passages of the Upanishads shed light on the various spiritual disciplines that the seeker of truth can follow to realize the supreme goal of life. Of the many Upanishadic statements, four great dicta, *mahāvākyas*, are said to contain the quintessence of spiritual wisdom and are considered especially important by teachers of Advaita. These *mahāvākyas* are as follows: (i) ‘*prajñānam brahma*, Consciousness is Brahman’, from the *Aitareya Upanishad*; (ii) ‘*aham brahmāsmi*, I am Brahman’, from the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*; (iii) ‘*tat-tvam-asi*, thou art That’, from the *Chhāndogya Upanishad*; and (iv) ‘*āyam-ātmā brahma*, this Self is Brahman’, from the *Māndukya Upanishad*. Vidyaaranya Muni has elucidated the meaning of these *mahāvākyas* in his well-known work *Panchadashi*.² Sadananda Yogindra, in his *Vedāntasara*, has also explained the practical significance of these statements in the Advaitic approach to self-realization. This approach involves purification of the sadhaka’s (aspirant’s) intellect, thus paving the way for awakening of the highest spiritual knowledge.

The Instruction, *upadesha* ...

जातिनीतिकुलगोत्रदूरगं नामरूपगुणदोषवर्जितम् ।
देशकालविषयातिवर्ति यद्वद्वा तत्त्वमसि भावयात्मनि ॥

That which is beyond caste, creed, family, and lineage; devoid of name, form, merit, and demerit; transcending space, time, and sense-objects—that Brahman you are; meditate on this in your mind.

—Vivekachudamani, 254

To explain how these *mahāvākyas* help in the realization of one's true nature, Sadananda has discussed them under two heads: (i) *upadeśa vākya* (statement conveying spiritual instructions from the guru) and (ii) *anubhava vākya* (statement recording the spiritual experience of the disciple). *Tat-tvam-asi* is an *upadeśa vākya*, while the other three are *anubhava vākyas*.³

Self-realization through the Mahāvākyas

We shall now review the purport of these *mahāvākyas* in spiritual terms, and then evaluate their role in the spiritual life of a sadhaka as conceived in the Upanishads. The Advaitins assign an important place to the *upadeśa vākya* in their scheme of sadhana. Advaitic sadhana revolves round the knowledge of the Self, which the sadhakas strive to obtain by cleansing their intellects, the locus of the knowledge of one's true spiritual Self. While instructing the disciple through the *upadeśa vākya*—*tat-tvam-asi*—the guru takes pains to explain the essential non-difference between the denotative meanings of *tat* (That) and *tvam* (you) through a close scrutiny of the syntax. It is pointed out that, since both *tat* and *tvam* have the same case-ending—nominative—they must have identical denotative meanings. The apparent contradiction in their denotative meanings, characterized by remoteness (That) and immediacy (you), gets resolved when we resort to their implied meanings, namely pure Consciousness, which is their common substratum. For most sadhakas, this realization does not arise spontaneously in the intellect, covered as it is by a thick veil

of ignorance. Hence the guru prescribes certain disciplines—essentially psychological in nature—for cleansing the intellect. These steps are *śravaṇa* (hearing words of wisdom from the guru's lips), *manana* (reflection on the import of the *upadeśa vākya*), and *nididhyāsana* (continuous reflection on the meaning of the *upadeśa vākya*), culminating in the rise of spiritual knowledge when the intellect is free of its impurities (110–124).

The path of sadhana involving the use of *mahāvākyas* as prescribed by the Advaitins appears to be rather abstruse. It presupposes the acquisition of certain qualifications, including a thorough study of the sacred scriptures and the attainment of some degree of intellectual refinement to enable one to understand the true purport of scriptural passages. These qualifications cannot be easily acquired by all. So the sadhana involving the use of *mahāvākyas* would appear to be open to only a select few having the necessary qualifications.

But there is an alternative mode of spiritual discipline involving the use of the *mahāvākyas*, one that includes *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana*. A clue to this is found in the following passage from the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*: '*Ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo, maitreyi ātmano vā are darśanena śravaṇena matyā vijñānena idaṁ sarvaṁ veditam*. The Self, O Maitreyi, should be (directly) "seen" (i.e. experienced)—should be heard of (in the form of instruction from the teacher), reflected on (intellectually in consonance with the spirit of the Shastras), and meditated upon continuously (till the intellect is fully cleansed of ignorance). When the Self is (thus) seen—through hearing, reflection, and meditation—all is known (as projection of the Self).'⁴

A careful study of the above passage together with that of the *anubhava vākyas* reveals the dynamics of the alternative approach to realization of the truth embodied in the *mahāvākyas*. In this approach, apprehension of the truth of the *mahāvākyas* occurs in two stages. First, on hearing the *upadeśa vākya* from the guru, the disciple gets a glimpse of the real nature of the Self, in a flash as

it were. The reason for holding this view is that a *mahāvākya* uttered by a competent guru possesses the capacity (*śakti*)—similar to a mantra—for revealing the truth. A sacred mantra duly received from the guru at the time of initiation, *dīkṣa*, gets implanted in the sadhaka's intellect like a seed. If the sadhaka's intellect has already been fully purified by spiritual discipline, then the true nature of the Self signified by the *mahāvākya* is revealed immediately on receiving the guru's instruction. But, for most sadhakas, the intellect is covered by a veil of ignorance; so the experience of the Self remains hazy. The sadhaka, therefore, has to strive to remove this veil of ignorance from the intellect through the process of *manana* or reflection. The process involves focusing one's attention on the purport of the *upadeśa vākya* and reflecting on its validity. This gradually dispels the veil of ignorance covering the intellect and removes doubts about the validity of the *mahāvākya*. When the process of *manana* on the import of the *upadeśa vākya* is systematically prolonged so that the mind dwells continuously on Consciousness, that is the Self, *manana* gets transformed into *nididhyāsana* (continuous reflection). At this stage, there arises in the sadhaka's intellect an incessant stream of mental modifications (*citta-vṛtti*) centring on the meaning of the *upadeśa vākya*, which is then spontaneously transformed into the *anubhava vākya* of the form *aham brahmāsmi*, I am Brahman.

The Experience of Brahman

This *anubhava vākya* represents the sadhaka's experience of the real Self. After gaining this experience, the sadhaka discovers the immanence of Brahman all around. The term Brahman, in fact, is derived from the root *br̥h*, 'vast', or *br̥mh*, 'to grow', and signifies the all-pervading nature of the ultimate Reality.

When the sadhaka withdraws the gaze from the objective world and directs it back within, his or her Self-experience is conveyed by the third *anubhava vākya*—*ayam-ātmā brahma*, this Self is Brahman. The true Self is also experienced as pure Consciousness (*prajñāna-ghana*), the very basis

... and the Realization, *anubhuti*

मनोबुद्धयहंकारचित्तानि नाहं न च श्रोत्रजिह्वे न च घ्राणनेत्रे ।
न च व्योमभूमी न तेजो न वायुश्चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहं शिवोऽहम् ॥

I am neither the mind, nor the intellect, nor the ego, nor the mind-stuff; I am neither the body, nor the changes of the body; I am neither the senses of hearing, taste, smell, or sight; nor am I the ether, the earth, the fire, the air; I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute—I am He, I am He.

—Shankaracharya, *Nirvanashatkam*, 1

of all knowledge. This leads to the realization that Brahman (the basis of the universe) is Consciousness, *prajñānam brahma*.

It may be mentioned here that this knowledge arising from direct Self-experience is totally different in nature from the intellectual knowledge one gathers on the mundane plane. This latter knowledge consists of the 'three poles of experience, *tripuṭi*', namely the knower or subject, the object of knowledge, and the means for obtaining this knowledge. But the highest spiritual knowledge of the Self—infinite and pure—is devoid of these distinctions. It is *akhaṇḍa* or integral knowledge, and can only be obtained by transcending all limitation in the form of the intellect, senses, and sense experiences. It is ineffable in nature. The Upanishads rightly indicate the nature of this supreme state when they say '*brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati*, (one who knows) Brahman becomes Brahman indeed'; the knower of Brahman's all-pervasive nature becomes the all pervasive Self.⁵ This is the goal of spiritual life; here ends the sadhaka's spiritual journey.



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Cosmological Reflections in Ancient Indian Literature

Rita Roy Chowdhury

THE details in which the Puranic literature abounds are not mere play of an idle imagination. On the contrary, they reflect deep contemplation and keen observation of the phenomena of the world. The Puranic thinkers had their feet firmly established on the ground, in the world of experience, and this formed the basis of their philosophical analysis. This is their merit and their distinction. To justify the claim that Puranic cosmology is not mere imaginative speculation, but contains elements revealing their scientific and rational attitude, is the main objective of this article.

Cosmology, according to contemporary lexicographers, is 'the science of the origin and development of the universe'.¹ The Puranic sense of the term deviates from this accepted meaning: it is the threefold study of the creation of the universe, its destruction, and its re-creation (*sarga-pratisarga*). Puranic thinkers were aware of a cyclic movement in nature. They confronted the intriguing question of creation keeping the dynamic nature of the universe in mind. In the Bhagavata, Narada inquires, 'My Lord, kindly tell me the truth about this universe, what its characteristics are, on what it is supported, by whom it has been created, where it ultimately rests, by what power it is ruled, and what it essentially is.'² Narada voices the query of any ordinary, inquisitive person who naturally yearns to understand the universe and his or her place within it.

Puranic cosmological study is not a sudden or disconnected inquiry. It is founded on a continuity of contemplation that has given us five thousand years of history. The Puranas share a common platform with the Vedas and the Upanishads, and can best be understood when studied in association with the cosmological theories advocated by

them. Besides, this approach will justify our claim to legacy. Therefore, we will begin our discussion with the explanations of the Vedas and Upanishads, comparing them with cosmogenetic theories of some other ancient civilizations to map similarity of thought across the globe.

Vedic Cosmology

The Vedic philosophers were firm believers in the theory of causality. If everything has a cause, then, 'Who hath beheld him as he sprang to being, seen how the boneless One supports the bony? Where is the blood of earth, the life, the spirit?'³ Where is the cause of the universe? What is the power or force that has coordinated this complex state of affairs? The Vedic seers viewed creation not as a new beginning, but as an arrangement and organization of all that lay in chaos. To bring harmony into the disorganized morass is Creation. The pre-Creation state is described in the 'Nasadiya Sukta' thus:

Then was not non-existent nor existent: there
was no realm of air, no sky beyond it.
... no sign was there, the day's and night's divider. ...
Darkness there was: at first concealed in darkness
this all was indiscriminated chaos.
All that existed then was void and formless.
(10.129.1-3)

To bring order and harmony to the chaotic mass was the task of Vishwakarma, 'the Sole God, producing earth and heaven'—'Dhātār, the great Creator ... [who] formed in order Heaven and Earth, the regions of the air, and light' (10.81.3, 190.3).

It seems highly significant that a similar undefined pre-Creation state of the universe is described in Egyptian cosmology: 'Not yet was the heaven, not yet the earth, men were not, not yet born were

the gods, not yet was death.’⁴ In ancient Greece, this initial formless state of the universe was referred to as ‘chaos’. According to the ancient Egyptians, in the beginning only the ocean existed, upon which there appeared an egg, out of which issued the sun-god. He who governed the world, He alone kept it in good order, and He alone had created it. Not that He had evoked it out of nothing; there was no concept of nothingness as yet, and even to the most primitive theologians, creation was only a bringing of pre-existent elements into play. The latent germs of things were already in existence, in timeless sleep in the bosom of the dark waters.

We find a similar description in the Rig Veda:

What was the germ primeval which the waters received where all the Gods were seen together?
The waters, they received that germ primeval wherein the Gods were gathered all together.
It rested set upon the Unborn’s navel, that One wherein abide all things existing.⁵

The Creator, as Hiranyagarbha, arose from the great waters and by his power and energy germinated the egg containing the world matter, thus setting in motion the process of Creation. From this standpoint, Creation was not a new beginning but a rearrangement, setting things in a proper order.

The Vedic philosophers found a unique way to relate the Creator and the created. Creation is actually the manifestation of the Purusha, the first cause, in all things living and non-living. How did he do it? By becoming the object of sacrifice:

This Puruṣa is all that yet hath been and all that is to be ...
So mighty is his greatness; yea, greater than this is Puruṣa.
All creatures are one-fourth of him, three-fourths eternal life in heaven.
With three-fourths, Puruṣa went up: one-fourth of him again was here.
Thence he strode out to every side over what eats not and what eats.
From him Virāj was born; again Puruṣa from Virāj was born.
As soon as he was born he spread eastward and westward o’er the earth.

When Gods prepared the sacrifice with Puruṣa as their offering, ...

They balmed as victim on the grass Puruṣa born in earliest time (10.90.2–7).

The ‘Purusha Sukta’, as this hymn is known, describes how all things and beings of the universe come from this sacrifice, and are none other than the Purusha himself. This significant observation helps to explain how the similar and dissimilar objects of nature have a common origin. ‘From that great general sacrifice the dripping fat was gathered up. He formed the creatures of the air, and animals both wild and tame’ (10.90.8). It is interesting to note the attempt to harmonize our physical and intellectual realms at their very source. Flavoured by pantheism, the ‘Purusha Sukta’ attempts a pragmatic explanation of Creation. As I have already mentioned, the patterns of human thought appear similar through the ages. In Nordic mythology, Ymir, the cosmic world-giant, came into existence; from his body was made the world:

From the flesh of Ymir the world was formed,
From his bones were mountains made,
And Heaven from the skull of that frost-cold giant,
From his blood the billows of the sea.⁶

The emphasis is on transformation, not on formation. What is, is rearranged; nothing is added or subtracted. Through this is explained the natural balance of nature and the universal recycling process. Science calls it ‘conservation of energy’. We see such transformation everywhere in nature: when the flower unfolds, the bud disappears, and the egg breaks to make way for the chick. Likewise, in the process of Creation, ‘Ye will not find him who produced these creatures: another thing hath risen up among you.’⁷

The Purusha permeates the whole of nature:
The moon was gendered from his mind, and
from his eye the Sun had birth;
Indra and Agni from his mouth were born, and
Vāyu from his breath’ (10.90.13).

The world vibrates with his presence. The Creator

Cosmogenesis as a Sacrifice

There was nothing whatsoever here in the beginning. It was covered only by Death [Hiranyagarbha], or Hunger, for hunger is death. He created the mind, thinking, 'Let me have a mind.' He moved about worshipping (himself). ...

He desired, 'Let me have a second form (body). He, Death or Hunger, brought about the union of speech [the Vedas] with the mind. What was the seed there became the Year [Viraj]. Before him there had been no year. He (Death) reared him for as long as a year, and after this period projected him. When he was born, (Death) opened his mouth (to swallow him). He (the babe) cried, 'Bhan!' That became speech. He thought, 'If I kill him, I shall be making very little food.' Through that speech and the mind he projected all this, whatever there is—the Vedas: Rig, Yajus, and Saman; the metres, the sacrifices, men, and animals. Whatever, he projected, he resolved to eat. Because he eats everything, therefore Aditi (Death) is so called. ...

He desired, 'Let this body of mine be fit for a sacrifice, and let me be embodied through this,' (and entered it). Because that body swelled (*ashvat*), therefore it came to be called Ashva (horse). And because it became fit for a sacrifice, therefore the horse sacrifice came to be known as Ashvamedha.

—Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.2.1–7

secures steadfast all that is, by his law, *ṛta*. He remains beyond all change. This Being who is past, present, and future (what has been and what shall be) the Upanishads termed Brahman.

Upanishadic Cosmology

The cosmology of the Upanishads revolves around Brahman, the Supreme Soul, the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe. 'He is the womb of living beings and the end of living beings.'⁸ Brahman willed, 'I shall multiply and be born.'⁹ For this, Prajapati, the Lord of all creatures, produced two instrumental causes, matter and life, with the inten-

tion that they would multiply in manifold ways.¹⁰ The Upanishad explains the origin of all beings: 'That in truth out of which these creatures arise, whereby they, having arisen live, and into which they at death return again, that seek thou to know, that is Brahman.'¹¹ Again, the simile of a cosmic 'egg', which 'hatches' the universe, is used to describe the process of creation.¹²

Creation then becomes a threefold event—from the principal cause, through the cosmic egg, to the primary evolutes. These evolutes—earth, water, fire, air, and space, with their specific functions—are eternal and combine according to their nature to produce this world of variety in accordance with divine law. The source of law or *ṛta*—Brahman—is also the Virat Purusha, the material cause. How do the ancient thinkers relate the Creator to his Creation? Identity: the Creation is a reflection of Brahman. The moon is reflected in the water and breaks into fragments when there is a ripple; it is the same with Brahman. Imagine the reflection of the moon without the moon! It is impossible. Similarly, without Brahman, there is no Creation. To say that the primeval Being created the universe and then as the first-born entered into it, is only another way of saying that the Creator permeates the Creation, as a lump of salt dissolves in a glass of water, as blood runs through the whole body and is the support of life.

The ancient seers specially remarked on the cyclic order of natural events. Their meticulous observation of natural phenomena attests to their scientific and logical temperament. Whatever is created in time cannot be eternal. Consequently the universe, which was created in time (in a particular *kalpa* or cosmic era), will have an end in time. Its dissolution is not annihilation but dispersion: the basic elements remain unaltered, being parts of the divine Purusha, of Brahman. They are drawn back to the heart of Reality by a centripetal force, only to be set in motion once again. 'At the end of a cycle all beings, O son of Kunti, enter into my nature; again, at the beginning of the cycle I bring them forth.'¹³

Purusha and Prakriti

Samkhya philosophers divide Reality into two ever-separate principles: Purusha and Prakriti, pure Spirit and nature or matter. They hold that Creation is a process of real *pariṇāma* or transformation of the cause: Purusha is the efficient cause, and Prakriti the material cause of the universe. Purusha neither produces nor is produced. Prakriti is also eternal and uncaused, but it has the inherent potential or tendency to produce; indeed, it produces the universe, in *proximity* to Purusha. Purusha (like Brahman of the Vedānta) is the transcendental Self. It is absolute, independent, free, imperceptible, and unknowable—above any experience and beyond any words or explanation. It is pure, ‘non-attributive consciousness’.

Prakriti is the material cause of the world; its dynamism is attributed to its constituent *guṇas*. The *guṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*) are not mere constituents or simply qualities: the *guṇas* are the very essence of Prakriti, and in consequence, of all world objects. Prakriti is considered homogeneous; its *guṇas* cannot be separated one from another. Though the *guṇas* are always changing, rendering a dynamic character to Prakriti, still a balance among them is maintained. Change in the *guṇas* may take two forms: homogeneous and heterogeneous. Homogeneous changes do not affect Prakriti’s state of equilibrium, and no worldly objects are produced. Heterogeneous changes involve radical interaction among the three *guṇas*, disturbing the state of equilibrium. This preliminary phase of the evolutionary process is initiated by *rajas*, which activates *sattva*; these two then overpower the inertia of *tamas*. Purusha is always behind this disturbance. The relation between Purusha and Prakriti may be likened to that between a magnet and a piece of iron. Though Purusha is entirely independent of Prakriti, it nevertheless influences Prakriti, prompts it, as it were, to act. As the *guṇas* undergo more and more changes, Prakriti goes on differentiating into multifarious world-objects, becoming more and more determinate. This is the process of evolution, which is followed by involution. At the time of in-

volution or dissolution, all physical existence and all world-objects resolve back into Prakriti, which again abides as the undifferentiated, primordial substance. Thus the cycles of evolution and involution follow each other. This Samkhya conception forms the background of Puranic cosmology.

Puranic Cosmology

Puranic cosmology follows *vivartavāda*, the theory of ‘apparent transformation’: ‘Know that the *Prākṛta* (the creation of Prakṛti) is the *Vivarta* (transformation) (of *Brahman*).’¹⁴ The Puranic description of the cycle of creation-dissolution-recreation is noteworthy: it is here that the Puranas no longer remain mere folklore but rise to the level of intellectual discourse. Creation or *sṛṣṭi* is a vibration within the root cause which results in the sprouting forth of this world. As in the Vedas as well as Egyptian cosmology, the Puranas also refer to a ‘golden egg’, Hiranyagarbha, from which the universe emerges. Since Creation is evolution—a change of form, a manifestation of that which lay nascent—it must have been contained within something like a womb. What could that be? A projection of Brahman or an evolute of Prakriti in proximity to Purusha? Another question associated with this creative activity is, ‘Why did he create?’ Addressing the second question, the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* observes, ‘With a desire to create he who is beyond measures, creates the great Creation’ (1.1.3.16). Desire is accounted as the motive force. It is through desire that we strive to achieve. This psychological element in Puranic cosmology seems significant and adds a distinct flavour to the Puranas, bringing them in line with the Upanishads. Compare with the hymn to Aten from ancient Egypt: ‘Thou sole God, like to whom there is no other, thou didst create the earth after thy heart, being alone.’¹⁵

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* describes the cosmic egg, the *andā*:

These seven worlds are well established in this cosmic egg; the whole earth along with the seven continents, the seven oceans, the great mountains and thousands of rivers are established in the very

same cosmic egg. These worlds are situated within (the cosmic egg). This universe is within the cosmos. Everything is established in that cosmic egg—viz. the moon and the sun along with the stars, planets and the wind as well as the mountain Lokāloka.¹⁶

As in the Vedas, so in the Puranas, Hiranyagarbha is lauded here by the *sūta* Romaharshana: 'I bow down to Hiranyagarbha, the lordly Puruṣa who is unborn, who is the first creator of subjects, who is the most excellent one, through whom the Kalpa has been competent to have its characteristics; through whom the fire has been capable of being a purifying factor; and who is the self-born Brahmā administering all the worlds' (1.1.3.5–6). This conception brings to mind the biblical story of the ark of Noah, which carried all species of life during the deluge. As all life in the natural world appeared to the ancient sages to begin either in an egg or from a seed, the sages could have inferred the visible world to be likewise springing forth from an egg. The egg with its spherical shape, hollow and moist interior (resembling the womb), and hard shell, could carry and protect the germs of the previous *kalpa* after dissolution for the subsequent creation of the following *kalpa*. Seven layers covered it, seven natural envelopes—*āpa*, *tejas*, *vāyu*, *nabhas*, *bhūtādi*, *mahat*, and *pradhāna*. The cosmic egg can also be seen as the sun (*hiranya* = gold), the golden disk, also worshipped in Egypt as the source of all life—and scientifically so. In the hymn to Aten, the sun-god, the young king Akhenaten prays: 'O living Aton [*sic*], Beginning of life! When thou risest in the eastern horizon, thou fillest every land with thy beauty.' He further supplicates: 'Thou art he who createst the man-child in woman, Who makest seed in man, Who giveth life to the son in the body of his mother ... Who givest breath to animate every one that He maketh.'¹⁷

The mechanism of creation has been elaborated in the *Brahmanda Purana* as some sort of activity or movement which stirs the *guṇas* from their dormant state. The *guṇas* lose their equilibrium and the cycle restarts. Time (*kāla*) plays a significant

role in creation and destruction. Time is eternal: 'The deity as Time is without beginning, and his end is not known; and from him the revolutions of creation, continuance and dissolution unintermittingly succeed.'¹⁸

Creation thus involves two factors, or forces, or partners. The *Vishnu Purana* names 'Hari' the instrumental cause and the cosmic egg the material cause; the *Agni Purana* calls the instrumental cause Vishnu, the *Brahmanda Purana*, Brahma. 'It is that *acintyātman* (incomprehensible soul) who is the maker of all living beings. They (the learned) say that the Vedas are his head; the firmament is his navel; the sun and the moon are his eyes; the quarters are his ears, know that the earth constitutes his feet.'¹⁹ Here again the Purana reverts to the Vedic concept of the cosmic Puruṣa, whose immanence is clearly the most consistent characteristic of Indic cosmological conceptions.



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Facing Ethical Dilemmas

Dilip Dhopavkar and Prashant Puppal

(Continued from the previous issue)

MOHAN*: My friend works in the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). While joining the CRPF he cleared all tests; but the force has a caste-based selection criterion, and just as politicians who fail to produce their caste certificates are barred from reserved seats, he also was facing cancellation on that account. He went to his village and procured the caste certificate. Then the CRPF selectors asked him to take the fitness test again and informed him that his physical fitness had reduced during that period. My friend then explained the situation to me and asked for my advice. He wanted to join the CRPF as his family was dependent on him. He was supposed to pay Rs 20,000 to get admitted. I told him, 'Once you join the CRPF you will be posted to Kashmir or Manipur and will be away from your family, but you can send money back home. So pay the amount and join the CRPF, but when you become a selector, ensure that you don't take any bribes.' He thought over my advice and also built up his physical fitness by exercising for one and a half months. He finally paid Rs 10,000 and got into the CRPF. After some three years he was on the selection committee and followed this rule of not accepting bribes, selecting only deserving candidates. Today he is the chief of a battalion. We met recently and he told me his rule. So in some practical situations you don't have any choice.

Gita*: I don't agree with the gentleman who spoke just now. When his friend faced the situation he had to pay the amount to move ahead, but now, when he selects candidates, he should understand that some candidates might be in a situation similar

to the one he was in. First of all, it is wrong to pay to get entry. Secondly, he should understand that others could also be in a similar plight.

Prashant Puppal: Do you mean that we need to see the situation and then accept money?

Gita: No, that's not what I mean. One can do other things with money rather than paying bribes and getting caste certificates just to get into the CRPF. By not paying bribes we can feel truthful and also discourage the bribe system.

Prashant Puppal: We won't get into cross arguments. But, when we see 'practical situations', we become more selfish, take refuge in beautiful words like 'practical', 'compromise', and so on, and bend truthfulness, don't we?

Dhananjay: After I completed tenth standard, I was in urgent need of a job. One of the sugar factories in my home town had a recruitment drive, so I went to the village sarpanch (council head) and requested him for a job. He placed two conditions before me: one was paying him some money, and second was that my brother should leave the political party he was working for and join the sarpanch's party. I told him I would think over the matter. I was really in need of the job, as my family needs as well as my future education were dependent on it. I could have collected the amount he wanted from friends or relatives, but to ask my brother to compromise on his own principles was unacceptable to me. So I rejected the sarpanch's conditions. Now I feel that my decision was the right one, though I would have earned ten or fifteen thousand rupees if I had accepted that job. Instead I studied hard and completed my BE, and now I am earning more. So I feel that instead of paying bribes we should face the situation we are in boldly and wait for something good to emerge out of it.

* Names marked with an asterisk are not the participants' real names.

Parked in a 'No Parking' Zone!

Your vehicle is parked in a busy zone. When you get back to it after shopping you find a police officer ready to book you. You hadn't realised it was a 'no parking' zone. He or she tells you that the fine is Rs 800, but will let you go for Rs 200. What rate do you settle for? What will your response be if the vehicle belongs to the Math?

Amrita: I had gone to pay my electric bill and was waiting in the queue. The office parking area was full of vehicles and many people, myself included, had no other option but to park our vehicles on the road, though we knew it was a 'no parking' area. I was second or third in line. A traffic police van approached the area, though I was not aware of it. One old man sat on my vehicle and started shouting, 'Whose vehicle is this?' I jumped out of the line and ran towards my vehicle. I quickly took control of my vehicle and even inserted the key, but a traffic police officer, a woman, came up and snatched the key. The police had already taken many other vehicles into their custody. I requested the officer to let me go as I was sitting on the vehicle and was about to take it out, but she refused to listen to me. I think, being a lady officer, she purposefully acted tough as one woman acts against another! [laughter]. She took my vehicle and put it into the police van. To tell the truth, I am under eighteen and hence don't have a license [laughter]. It was my mistake. Afterwards, as per rule, she started returning vehicles payment of a Rs 150 fine. But people bargained with her and persuaded her to take hundred rupees. My vehicle was the last one. I was so afraid. I had money in my pocket, which I had brought for bill payment. I was so worried that I ran to the nearest pan shop and exchanged my hundred-rupee note for ten-rupee notes, and put one ten-rupee note in one pocket and the rest in another pocket [laughter]. I was facing such a situation for the first time in my life; so I felt very awkward. I had heard from others that if you get caught like this then you should start crying! [laughter]. But instead of acting, I actually started crying! Now the officer was scared and asked me to stop crying! She said

that people would think she had harmed me. She had two assistants with her; they took my vehicle out of the van. She asked me for a hundred rupees. I told her that I didn't have that much money as I had come here for bill payment. Then she asked for eighty rupees. Again I said I didn't have that much. Then she said, 'Give at least fifty rupees. I won't take less than that.' I was scared and said I didn't have the amount. I showed her my pocket and asked her to take the ten-rupee note. She was convinced and took it! Then she went away. Some people observing this whole episode asked me how I was let off with such a small fine. They threatened to complain at the police station that they had paid extra money! I don't know whether they really did so or not, but I was clearly confused as to how to handle the situation.

Now if this had happened at the Math—I think I would have handled it peacefully.

Prashant Puppall: No, the question was, if you have taken the Math vehicle outside for some work and then you are caught for parking it in a 'no parking' zone, what will you do?

Amrita: For a Math vehicle, I would give whatever amount is required as a fine.

Prashant Puppall: First of all, you shouldn't take a Math vehicle since you don't have a license! [laughter].

Seema: My scooter was once picked up from the Shanipar Chowk [a place in Old Pune]. I had parked it by mistake in an area reserved for bicycle parking. When I went to the Farashkhana police station to retrieve it, they asked for Rs 150. Though I had the amount, some people suggested that I say that I didn't have the amount. I am ashamed to say that I claimed that I didn't have that much money. They said, 'Give whatever you have.' I gave a hundred rupees and took back my vehicle. I saw there an old gentleman who had his military card with him. He just showed the card to the police and took his vehicle without paying any money. He immediately started his vehicle and sped off. He even forgot to take his wife, who was shouting and running after him!

If it had been a Math vehicle—it doesn't matter whose vehicle it is, a mistake is a mistake, and the fine has to be paid; but not an arbitrary amount. Only the applicable fine should be paid.

Kiran: I have come across this situation many a time. As much as possible—or rather always—I have paid whatever the cost because I don't want the policeman ...

Prashant Puppal: And in spite of so many incidents you have not learnt!

Kiran: No, you make mistakes. I try not to, but whenever I meet such a situation I pay, be it for the Math or myself. I will not pay a bribe. I am able to pay—but that's another matter.

Satya: What I do, I make sure that I don't park in a 'no parking' zone. If a place doesn't have a parking place, I don't go there. Today my wife shouted at me, 'Why don't you want to go?' I said, 'There is no parking space there, and I am not going to go somewhere just because you like it.' Once in a while I see my wife parking illegally, and I shout at her. It is not right. The question is not really what you feel or what you don't feel. There is something called 'traffic rules'. I think nobody in this city seems to know that there is something called 'traffic rules'.

Balan: I once parked in a 'no parking' area by mistake, and my vehicle was impounded. When I went to retrieve my car, the policeman was not ready to make a bill. I was ready to pay the fine, but he wanted me to settle for a smaller amount and was making offers. I was not very happy with that. He did not even have a bill book. He was telling me that I had to pay Rs 1,000, and so many things, because I had a Tamil Nadu registration. In spite of that, I would have been happy to pay the right amount. But he was not ready to take it, and I was forced to pay a hundred rupees to get my vehicle back.

In the case of a Math vehicle: First of all, if I am taking somebody else's vehicle, I should not park in a 'no parking' zone. If something happens, and I have to pay the actual fine for any government or public vehicle, I don't think there is a point in paying a bribe.

Prashant Puppal: So you don't feel like using the Math's name to retrieve the vehicle.

Balan: I feel that the police often just want to get money from you. They try to find some fault or other. So sometimes one has to compromise.

Kailas: In both cases, with my own or a Math vehicle, I would try to negotiate for Rs 200, or even less.

Dilip Dhopavakar: Have you done that? Have you faced a situation like this?

Kailas: Yes, I did two or three times when I was in Bangalore. In all the situations I did negotiate with the policeman for the bribe only because the difference between the amount of the actual fine and of the settlement was large.

Prashant Puppal: But when you try to negotiate, what is your inner feeling? How do you react to that?

Kailas: See, nobody likes to do bad things. I understand that this is a bad thing, but ...

Prashant Puppal: No, what happens to you actually? Does your heart rate go up when you negotiate, or are you absolutely calm and cold blooded?

Kailas: No, it is never cold blooded.

Prashant Puppal: Does your face show a reaction when you are doing something wrong? Or, you don't allow those feelings to enter deep, so that you have a barrier which arrests any uncomfortable feelings.

Kailas: Of course yes, when it comes to money!

Snehal: My vehicle was picked up twice near the S P College. I thought it might be my fault. But the third time, I felt it wasn't my mistake, so I asked them the reason for picking up my vehicle. They told me that they have a monthly target to meet, and if they are short of that target they pick up any vehicle, at random! I didn't like that, so for one and a half hours I argued with them. They suspected me of being an activist, but threatened that if I argued more they would put me behind bars. I said, 'No problem, you put me behind bars. I work for the press.' When I showed them my I-card, they

When in Doubt ...

Should you have any doubt with regard to duties and customs, you should behave in those matters just as the wise do—those who may happen to be there and who are able deliberators, who are adepts in those duties and customs, who are not directed by others, who are not cruel, and who are lovers of dharma. Then, as for the accused people, you should behave with regard to them just as the wise do. ... This is the rule. This is the teaching. This is the secret of the Vedas.

—Taittiriya Upanishad, 1.9.3–4

relented. So when I tell the police that I am with the press, they leave me alone. But it is not proper to do that.

Prashant Puppal: You have an I-card, but you don't work for the press!

Snehal: No, no, I do work for the press—that's why I have the card! [laughter].

Sandesh: Once my own and my friend's vehicles were both picked up. We went to the police station and tried to plead our case with a lady inspector, saying that this was the first time, we wouldn't do it again, and so on. The officer said that my friend would be let off as she is a girl, but I would have to pay the fine! I was furious and argued with her a lot because it wasn't fair. So ultimately she made both of us pay Rs 150. I wanted to share this because the officer had said that my friend was being allowed to go because she was a girl. I thought this wasn't fair.

Prashant Puppal: Has anyone told the policeman that you want to meet his superior, challenging him by saying, 'If you don't listen to me I will go to the higher-ups'?

Sandesh: I challenged an officer because my maternal uncle was heading the Pune Traffic Police! I said to him, 'You can take my vehicle to the station—I don't care!' But this is wrong. I am using

my uncle's position unfairly and I definitely feel that this is wrong, so I try my utmost not to park in a 'no parking' area. If I don't get a parking space, I wait for one.

Prashant Puppal: My father used to work for the Central Intelligence Department (CID). Once we were going from our college to our hostel—three on a scooter, myself and two friends—and were caught. I told the police that my father works in the CID (he was doing so at that time). I was surprised by his reaction: He said, 'Good! CID means you are from us policemen.' I agreed. Then he said, 'Then I must take a bigger fine from you! Since you know most of the rules and you are deviating, I should fine you more.' Of course he didn't fine me. But when we reveal the relationship, it actually puts more responsibility on our shoulders.

Nitin: I was coming to the Math for a class, but was getting late. The signal near the Math was red, but as many just take the turn to the Math anyway, I did the same. A police officer caught me. After seeing my license, he told me to pay Rs 200 as fine. I told him, 'I won't give you the fine; let us go to court. You have to prove that it was my mistake. I know it was my mistake, but you have to prove it in court; then I will pay the fine. Take my license. We will talk when I come back from class.' My vehicle had an advocate logo. He looked thoroughly at my vehicle and then just let me go!

Dad Not at Home?

Father is overworked and the only way to keep off callers over phone is to say that he is not at home. Will you lie?

Seema: I did that once. My father had just returned from his office and was very tired. He didn't want any other commitments. One of his friends called up, wanting to go out. My father asked me to tell him that he was not there. So I told him, 'No, he is not at home.' Later I asked my father why he asked me to lie when he was committed to go with his friend. But he justified it, saying that it is okay to lie if that lie doesn't cause any harm to the other person. I didn't have any guilty conscience after that.

Lata*: My father is a Chartered Accountant. Many calls come asking for loans and so on. When such useless calls come, I confidently say that he is not at home. Also, some clients have been given a fixed time to call; but they ignore it, calling at odd hours. If they call at such times, even if father is awake I tell them that he is not at home just to teach them a lesson. And I don't feel I am wrong in doing so.

Vaibhav: Occasionally this happens. I realize that it is not good to tell a lie, so sometimes I try to make a play of words—rather than saying directly that my dad is not at home, I say, 'No, he is not available; please call later.'

Dilip Dhopavakar: But what do you feel about it? Do you feel it is right or wrong?

Vaibhav: It is right because I am not lying. I am not saying that my dad is not at home. I just request the person to call later.

Satya: I never thought about lying, though sometimes calls that I don't want to take do come. As a software engineer I am very busy. But in such cases I think we should never lie. I take up the phone and explain that I am busy or tired: 'Can we talk tomorrow or at some other time?' I think in all cases it is good to talk straight.

Shyam*: I think there is no need to tell any lie in such instances. If my father is tired, I will say, 'My father has worked a lot and he is tired now.' If it is very urgent I can ask him, or I can explain the situation to another person. There is no need to tell a lie in any situation unless you have something to hide.

Veena: I agree that there is no need to lie at any time. Sleeping after a whole day's work at the office is not an embarrassing thing to tell a caller. So one can face such situations by telling simple truths. Often when one lies, it creates confusion in one's own mind, and subconsciously we may get disturbed.

Vaibhav: I want to add something to support my opinion. In the Mahabharata we find the incident of Yudhishtira telling Drona that the elephant Ashwatthama died. Drona's son was also

... Follow the Wise

क्रोधो हर्षश्च दर्पश्च ह्रीः स्तम्भो मान्यमानिता ।
यमर्थान्नापकर्षन्ति स वै पण्डित उच्यते ॥

He indeed is called wise who is not swayed from his goal by anger, delight, pride, shame, arrogance, or self-importance.

यस्य कृतं न विघ्नन्ति शीतमुष्णं भयं रतिः ।
समृद्धिरसमृद्धिर्वा स वै पण्डित उच्यते ॥

He indeed is called wise whose actions are not affected by climatic changes—heat and cold—fear, lust, and change of fortune—prosperity or poverty.

—Mahabharata, 5.33.17, 19

called Ashwatthama. Yudhishtira said the word *elephant* so softly that Drona couldn't hear. That doesn't mean that Yudhishtira was right. It was the same with me [laughter].

Dilip Dhopavakar: Good. Very Good.

Prashant Puppall: So after you lie you just whisper 'I am lying'! [laughter].

Vishal: I also remember a tale that I had heard in my childhood. A disciple goes to his guru and asks him, 'Why do I have to suffer so much in this life?' The guru says, 'In your previous birth, you were once walking along a road, on which a butcher was chasing a cow. The cow had gone ahead and the butcher asked you which way the cow had gone. You showed him the way, and he went and killed the cow. If you had lied the cow would have been saved and you would not be suffering now.' The Shastras and Puranas that we follow tell that if by lying one can do some good to another, then it is not wrong to lie. I agree with that.

Dilip Dhopavakar: This topic is extremely controversial. You cannot draw a line of demarcation between truth and falsehood—that one side of this line is truth, and on the other, are lies. People are anxious to know what the truth is and whether we should speak the truth. If a lie is for the welfare of

another then the lie is not a lie. This is a point he made. We cannot definitely say whether this is right or wrong. We will have more opportunities to discuss the validity of the truth and the lie. It is good that these discussions are throwing up certain issues. I see a desire in everybody's mind to know: Is what I am doing right or wrong?

Conclusion

Lakshmi*: I just want to say one thing. Yesterday I had a terrible day. I faced a situation where people were extremely inhuman. But today I came here and saw that people are so human, they do have feelings and emotions. And it makes me feel so good that, yes, there are really nice people in this world.

Swami Atmavikasananda: This session was wonderful. While listening to you, I found that the questions that bother you also bother us. We too are in the same field. When we have to deal with people at large, we come across many such situations. I would just mention a couple of things which we had to face. A few years ago, at the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Guwahati, one dilemma arose. Good quality rice was then only available on the black market. Now, every day, a preparation of *payas*, rice pudding, was to be offered to Sri Ramakrishna. The pujari swami, who performed the worship, approached the president of the ashrama and told him that good quality rice was required for the offering. The president swami pointed out that such rice would have to be purchased on the black market. The pujari swami replied that in that way they could get good quality rice for Sri Ramakrishna, their Ishta Deva. The big question was, if they bought rice on the black market and offered it to Sri Ramakrishna, would Sri Ramakrishna—who was the embodiment of truthfulness—accept it? I am telling this to you because just now we talked about ethics, morality, and the compromises required at the practical level. Ultimately, what we do depends on the strength we have. We have to grow by developing our strengths.

A nurse once came to me and complained that

in her hospital she witnessed thefts and doctors behaving improperly, which she couldn't tolerate. She asked me what she should do. I told her that if she blew the whistle she would lose the job. Was she prepared to face that? I told her that if she didn't have that strength, she should wait till she got enough strength to face the consequences.

Today we discussed many situations and talked about various ethical and moral dilemmas which we face in our daily lives. We may talk about 'ethics' and 'morality' and other such concepts: actually we are discussing what the Indian scriptures call *dharma*, '*dharanat dharma iti abuh*', that is the sustaining power. *Dharma* has the function of holding human society together for stability and growth. We have to follow ethics and morality because we are within a society and not outside it.

Such discussions are necessary. And out of these discussions we have to draw some practical solutions for our lives. As Abhijit pointed out, truth is truth and falsehood is falsehood. If we don't have the strength to always follow truth, we have to accept that, but we must strive to steer clear of untruth. We may fail a hundred times; still, let us make a firm resolve and try again.

Often we find that someone has to suffer for the mistake or carelessness of another. There is no satisfactory explanation for such situations. We have to say that it is the destiny of that person, which is another way of saying that his or her karma, past actions, brought it about. We often see that some small problem spoils a whole situation. What can we say to that? Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi says that an unpleasant truth should not be told. Thus all depends on the circumstances. What matters is the motive power behind our acts. If the motive is good, then things go smoothly. Holy Mother's companion Golap Ma was truth-loving, but was very outspoken. Holy Mother admonished her and warned that if she continued her ways she would lose all sense of *lajja*, modesty. So we should have the discrimination to know what things are to be said where, and what things are better left unsaid.



Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna

Narayan Chandra Ghosh

WHEN I was six years old, I was admitted to Tinkari Pandit's elementary school in Alambazar. The pandit taught me how to read and write, but I didn't care for arithmetic. I used to draw pictures instead of doing my arithmetic lessons. This angered my teacher and he complained to my father. Although my father was irritated, I continued to draw. I then entered the Hindu school at Baranagore, and my father engaged a private tutor to teach me mathematics in the afternoon. But I had no interest in learning mathematics, so I had to leave the school. My father then hired Jadunath Brahma to teach me at home full-time. Finally, observing my passion for art, my father enrolled me in the Government Art School in Bowbazar, Calcutta.

While I was in the Art School, I got to know one Navin, a fellow student who came from Jessore [now in Bangladesh]. One day he asked me, 'How far is Rasmani's Kali temple from your home in Baranagore?' I told him that it was nearby.

Navin replied, 'Today we shall not attend class. I want to visit your home.' I agreed. At noon we took a train from the Sealdah railway station and got off at the Belgharia station. We then began to walk towards Dakshineswar, taking a path through the meadow. Seeing Rasmani's Kali temple from a distance, Navin said, 'First we shall see the Divine Mother Kali and then we shall go to your home.'

We reached the Kali temple but could not see the

image of the Mother because the temple was closed. The guard told us that the temple would open at four in the afternoon, so we sat in the Panchavati grove to wait. It was about three then. Navin and I were singers, so we began to sing. Navin sang:

O Lord, my eyes cannot see you, but you are in my eyes.

My heart cannot know you, but you are hidden in my heart.

When Navin finished his song, I started to sing:

Except you, O Lord, who can save us from danger and distress?

Tell us, who else can be our helper in this gloomy world?

Just then someone shouted, 'Who are you? Who are you?' I saw a man coming towards us from the eastern side of the pond near the Panchavati. He seemed strange, and I thought he was mad. Standing in front of us, he said, "Who else can be our helper in this gloomy world?" Wonderful! You are right—"Who else can be our helper in this gloomy world?" Tell me, who else can help us except God? Sing, sing that song again.'

Then the man asked us, 'Where do you live? What are your names?' Listening to the way he spoke, we were convinced that he was mad. Perhaps he had come to the Kali temple for prasad. Navin asked him, 'Where is your home?' He replied: 'My home? It is very far away. But I live here. I call on Mother and I see Her day and night. Please sing that song again—"Except you, O Lord, who can save us from danger and distress? Tell us, who else can be our helper in this gloomy world?"'

Navin whispered to me, 'Madman!' I said, 'I think so.' That man did not pay any attention to our conversation. He said, 'You have come to see the Mother! Come, come! Come with me!'

Narayan Chandra Ghosh lived in Alambazar near Dakshineswar. He was a brother-in-law of Mahendranath Pal, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. Narayan met the Master when he was in school and later wrote these reminiscences. The text which appeared in *Udbodhan*, 98/9 (September 1996), 444-6, has been translated by Swami Chetanananda.

We were mesmerized by that madman's words and got up to follow him. He led us to the Kali temple, and the door opened as we approached. Standing near the door, the man said, 'Come in and see the Mother.' While we were seeing the Mother, he said, 'Sit down here.' We obeyed. The madman gave us flowers from the feet of the Mother and sanctified water from the copper spoon used in worship. Then he said, 'Come, come to my room.' We got up and again followed him like pet dogs.

I was really puzzled. I thought, 'Who is this madman? Is he truly mad?' He took us to a room at the north-west corner of the temple complex. He then served cucumber, papaya, and sweets to us and said, 'Eat. This is prasad from the Mother.' Spell-bound, we ate the prasad. He then took us to the western veranda of his room and poured water over our hands to wash them. He said, 'You sang very well—"Except you, O Lord, who can save us from danger and distress?" Now you can go home.'

We left for home, but I still did not know who that man was. By that time we were both convinced that he was not mad, but we continued to wonder, 'Who is that man?' Navin left for Calcutta and I returned to my home. I lay down in my bed but could not sleep. 'Who is that man?'—this question was continually pounding in my mind. Finally, at daybreak, I rushed to the Kali temple and went straight to the man's room. I saw him seated on his bed. With tears I bowed down and took the dust of his feet. He affectionately raised me up, took my hand, and asked, 'What is your name?' I replied, 'Narayan Chandra Ghosh.' At this his face brightened up, and he said, 'Narayan! Very well! Always remember these lines from the song you sang yesterday: "Except you, O Lord, who can save us from danger and distress? Tell us, who else can be our helper in this gloomy world?" Never forget those words. Whenever you have time, come here.'

I again bowed down to him and returned home. But still I did not know who he was, and he had not introduced himself. Nevertheless, from then on I would visit him often. Whenever I went, he

always gave me fruits and sweets—the Mother's prasad. He would then ask me to sing, and I would sing. One day the store manager of the Kali temple [Pitambar Samanta] told me that he was Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Thus time passed. I was attending art school and drawing pictures, but my mind dwelt on the Dakshineswar Kali temple. Every Friday, after school, I would catch the five o'clock train from Calcutta, get off at Belgharia, and go to visit the Master. At night I would walk back home. On Saturdays, I visited the Master after lunch, but I did not go on Sundays. On that day he had many distinguished visitors from Calcutta, and I had no opportunity to be alone with him and talk to him freely.

One evening during the month of Ashad [mid-June through mid-July], at eight in the evening, shortly after the vesper service of the Divine Mother, the Master returned to his room from the temple. He said to Pitambar, 'Well, it is raining heavily today. Whenever it rained like this in Kamarpukur I would eat some puffed rice. Could you bring some puffed rice for me?' Pitambar told someone, 'Go to my home and bring some puffed rice quickly.' He obeyed. There were five or six people in the Master's room. Pitambar and I sat near the Master because we felt very close to him.

The Master put the puffed rice in a basket and shared it with everyone. While giving some to me, he said, 'Narayan, take this prasad.' I said, 'Sir, you will have to have some first and then I shall eat the prasad.' The compassionate Master touched the puffed rice with his tongue and then said in an ecstatic mood, 'Now, eat this prasad.' I cupped my hands to receive that puffed rice from the Master and ate with great satisfaction.

Thus one year passed. I left the art school and got a job as a scene painter in the National Theatre, but I never forgot the Master. Often I would go to the Kali temple after five in the evening and return home after nine. Thus another eight or nine months passed. I quit that scene-painting job and began to study acting under Ardhendu Mustaphi.

After a while I became a regular paid actor in the theatre. This job made it difficult for me to visit the Master, but I did not forget him. Whenever I had time I went to Dakshineswar to see him. He also asked Girish Ghosh to teach me acting. Thus another year passed.

One Saturday in the month of Jaishtha [mid-May through mid-June] I stayed the night at the Kali temple. Sometime after nine Pitambar, Mahendra Pal of Sinthi, M [Mahendranath Gupta], a couple of devotees, and I were in the Master's room, listening to him speak. Suddenly the Master said to me, 'Narayan, you are now acting in the theatre. Please sing a song and let us listen.' Seeing me silent, he again said, 'Don't be shy. Please sing.'

I began to sing:

Where are you Lord? I am poor and lowly;
I have no home in this ever-changing world.

After I had sung a few lines, the Master affectionately caressed my head and said: 'Why do you consider yourself "poor and lowly"? He is near you.' Saying so, the mad Master began to laugh. But what a wretched man I was! I could not then understand what he meant. Even when the Master passed away two years later, I could not understand what he had said to me. But now I understand. I was very close to him but could not recognize him. Considering him to be mad, I carelessly lost him. This life has gone in vain. What strange fate!



A Girl Different

Manju was probably in class eight when she started coming to our ashrama. Her village, Dungri, is not far from the Ramakrishna Mission TB Sanatorium at Ranchi. She would participate in the different functions of the ashrama along with the other girls and boys of her village. She admired Swami Vivekananda greatly. As she grew up, this admiration turned into devotion.

It was during a very severe spell of winter that I went to her village in connection with some welfare activities. Walking along a muddy road, I saw little Manju standing outside her house. She requested me to come into her house, and I agreed to do so on my way back.

When I went to her house, a group of village elders flocked round me, as is usual in these villages. Manju first took me to a room where the photographs of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda had been kept on a shelf near the window. Flowers had been offered. When I made my pranams, it occurred to me that I should make some offering too. I had three hundred-rupee notes in my pocket. I offered the money, had some nice tea, and returned to the ashrama.

A week later, Manju came to my office. Knowing that her family was poor, I asked her if she had kept the three hundred-rupee notes safely. She appeared to be hesitant about answering me. I coaxed her: 'Okay Manju, you are not going to tell me, right.'

Manju replied with some hesitation, 'No Maharaj, I do not know how to explain it to you.'

'What do you mean? I saw the window next to the shelf open. Did the wind carry the notes away?'

'No Maharaj, I have spent the money.'

'Oh! That's nice. Money is meant to be spent, why should you be embarrassed about that? What did you spend it for?'

She was silent again. There aren't too many things that a fourteen-year-old village girl could spend money on.

'Did you spend it on your dress, or to purchase rations for your family?'

'No Maharaj, I did not spend it for myself.'

I was now very eager to know what Manju had done with the money. What she told me left me speechless.

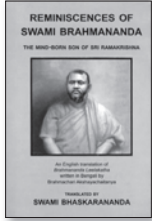
'Maharaj, you know our neighbours, how poor they are! I saw the three kids of the family shivering from cold. I could not bear to see their suffering. So I went to the Tupudana Bazar and purchased three sweaters for them at a hundred rupees each. When I gave the sweaters to them, how happy they were!'

Swami Vivekananda has said, 'They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.' Manju's heart was clearly alive, for it had transcended her small body-mind complex and embraced the so-called 'others'.

—Swami Vimokshananda, Durban

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



**Reminiscences of
Swami Brahmananda:
The Mind-born Son of
Sri Ramakrishna**
Br. Akshayachaitanya;
trans. Swami Bhaskarananda

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai
600 004. E-mail: srkmath@vsnl.com.
2006. xxxiv + 265 pp. Rs 75.

Spiritual aspirants are invariably enthusiastic at the commencement of their spiritual lives. But as the years roll by, they often find themselves plodding up the seemingly rough, dry, and joyless path to God-realization. The roseate hue of spiritual ardour has given way to the personality's negative tendencies, which obscure the spiritual light. It is during these periods of trial that one needs direction in even the smallest details of life. Actually, it is the neglect of those seemingly insignificant details in the enthusiastic rush for 'spirituality' that acts as a counterweight to inner progress. It is here that reading the lives and teachings of saints and sages can help.

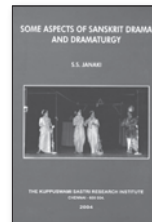
The enlightened direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna learnt the minutest details of spiritual life from their master during their discipleship with him, as well as from Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, and in the company of other brother disciples. They scrutinized the various paths, ascended the highest peaks of experience, and thus became skilful guides for seekers of all types of temperaments. One of the foremost among Sri Ramakrishna's disciples was Swami Brahmananda. Sri Ramakrishna himself had remarked about him, 'Rakhal has the intelligence of a king; he can rule a kingdom.' Taking the hint, Swami Vivekananda named him 'Raja' to the delight of Sri Ramakrishna and the support of the other disciples. He was a king in the spiritual realm. His teachings, and reminiscences about him—recorded by various devotees and disciples—are veritable spiritual treasures. Br. Akshayachaitanya, a disciple of the Holy Mother, set down his reminiscences of the great monk in the Bengali book *Brahmananda Lila-*

katha. The book under review is the new English translation of this work by Swami Bhaskarananda, and fulfils a long-felt need among English-knowing seekers of truth. The depth of character, clarity of guidance, and kaleidoscopic dimensions of this knower of Brahman can break one's erroneous, crystallized ideas of what constitutes spirituality.

A brief biography of Swami Brahmananda is followed by twenty-eight chapters of reminiscences; a number of photographs and glossary further enrich the book. Swami Bhaskarananda was gifted a copy of the Bengali book in 1963, when he was still a novice, and it has inspired him ever since. The idea of translating the book arose in his mind in 1974; finally, after long years of sincere wishes and hard work, the translation has come out. This is important, because some people lay their hands on a book and forthwith set to translate it. This translation has caught the subtle essence of the original Bengali. The language is simple, and footnotes are given to elaborate its contents where necessary.

Every spiritual aspirant, at whatever level of development, will be helped and inspired by this book. It will also prove interesting for anyone acquainted even remotely with the great Indian spiritual tradition. *Reminiscences of Swami Brahmananda* shows a yogi of the highest calibre at close quarters.

Swami Satyamayananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



**Some Aspects of
Sanskrit Drama
and Dramaturgy**
S S Janaki

Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute,
Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. 2005.
xvi + 462 pp. Rs 400.

Dr S S Janaki was a typical *brahmavadini* of the Vedic times. A gentle yet tough researcher, she was also a fine exegete, editor, and teacher. Sanskrit dramas were her special love. She studied them avidly and critically, and loved producing them reg-

ularly for the Chennai audience. Trained by Dr T Burrow of Oxford University and Dr V Raghavan, she was an enviable manuscriptologist as well. She never wrote down anything idly, and hence all her contributions scattered in many publications have a rare value for the *sahridaya*, 'co-heart', and the researcher. Dr Janaki was also a fine human being. Therefore, it is no wonder that her students have come together to compile her writings into different volumes for posterity.

The first of the projected volumes is on drama and comes with a luminous foreword from another *bramavadini* of our times, Dr Kapila Vatsyayan. Kapilaji rightly refers to these writings as an 'illuminating lamp for future scholars'. How very true, we tell ourselves as we proceed with Dr Janaki's study of the poetic sources of Kalidasa's *Vikramorvashiya*. The theme goes back to the Rig Veda. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* speaks of the conditions laid down by Urvashi to marry Pururavas. Dr Janaki leaves no source untouched: *Brihad-devata*, the commentary *Vedartha-dipika*, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Puranas (twelve of them including *Vishnu* and *Vishnu-dharmottara*). Kalidasa's play is analysed and then works inspired by Kalidasa.

Kalidasa reigns supreme in several other essays too: The aesthetics of Abhinavagupta and dramatics of Bharata are brought in to light up the theme further. There is a Sanskrit article on the supporting women characters in *Malavikagnimitra*; they are compared to their counterparts in *Abhijnana-shakuntala* and *Vikramorvashiya*. Other dramatists studied in these essays are Bhasa, Shaktibhadra, and Harsha. Shaktibhadra is noted as an ideal dramatist who does not alter an existing legend and uses transformative material that gives a new glow to existing characters like Rama and Sita.

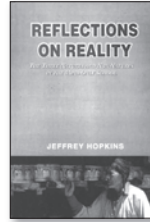
The other major subject treated in the essays is *bhāna*, which was the subject of Dr Janaki's 1971 thesis submitted to Oxford University. A *bhāna* is a solo performance: 'The solo actor of the play, the Viṭa, a chief man of the town, who knows in detail all the persons dwelling there, is most suited to introduce the various characters and criticise them in diverse ways. The other characters occurring in the theme are supposed to exist off-stage; with all of them the Viṭa carries his conversation through the *Nāṭyadharmī* technique of *ākāśabhāṣita* or imaginary conversation'.

Nearly two hundred *bhānas* have been written over the last two thousand years. Critically reviewing

Abhinavagupta on this subject, Dr Janaki points out that even the master-critic confuses categories like *bhāna* and *rupaka* (play-form). Vatsaraja's *Karpura-charita* comes in for special study, and we need not look elsewhere for the causes that brought about the decadence and disappearance of the dramatic stream in classical Sanskrit. Our interest never flags as the pages turn on, because there are rich essays like 'Of some epic echoes in Bhāṇas'. Dr Janaki's readings cover an awesome territory. The names of authors known and unknown take one's breath away: Shyamalika, Ishwaradatta, Kashipati Kaviraja, Tara-charana Tarkaratna. It is exhilarating to know that the celebrated Rupa Goswami authored *Dana-keli-kaumudi* on Krishna lila. There is a sparkling exactness about the essay on 'The Hand Gesture Patāka in Nāṭya'. Other graces, including a complete index, enrich the volume that is a testament to the price-less services rendered by the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute to the cause of Indian culture.

Dr Prema Nandakumar

Researcher and Literary Critic
Srirangam



**Reflections on Reality:
The Three Natures
and Non-Natures in
the Mind-Only School**
Jeffrey Hopkins

Motilal Banarasidass, 41 U A Bungalow
Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. E-
mail: mlbd@vsnl.com. 2006. x + 598 pp.
Rs 695.

Jeffrey Hopkins's *Reflections on Reality* stands in the middle of his metaphysical trilogy on Dzong-ka-ba's *The Essence of Eloquence*. In its preceding volume *Emptiness in the Mind-Only School of Buddhism*, Hopkins has presented his readers a historical and doctrinal analysis. The same spirit has been maintained in the first and second parts of the volume under review, where the tension between allegiance to authority and the temperament of rational enquiry, present in Buddhist monastic colleges, have come to the forefront. This struggle between faith and reason has built the edifice on which stand the subtle issues of epistemology, such as delineation of the levels of reality.

Dzong-ka-ba's *The Essence of Eloquence* is chiefly concerned with the seventh chapter of *Sutra Unraveling the Thought*, an important text of the

Mind-Only (*chitta-matra*) School of Buddhism, where this delineation of the levels of reality has been given great importance. In the third part of *Reflections on Reality*, Hopkins deals with three basic natures of Reality and three non-natures. This section is the very hub of the book.

In the *Sutra Unraveling the Thought*, in reply to the enquiries by Paramartha-samudgata, Buddha marks out three types of phenomena called the three natures (or three characters). They are 'imputational nature' (*parikalpita*), 'other-powered nature' (*paratantra*), and 'thoroughly established nature' (*parinishpanna*).

The objects that are established only as the referents of conceptual consciousness and not by their own character are called 'imputational' or *parikalpita*. Since they are not established 'by way of their own character', they fall in the category of 'character-non-nature'.

The objects that are impermanent as phenomena, that cannot be produced in and of themselves but only in dependence upon a set of causes and conditions, are called 'other-powered' or *paratantra*. They fall in the category of 'production-non-nature'. These are not ultimate categories, in the sense that they are not the final objects of meditations undertaken for purification, and hence they are classed in the 'ultimate-non-nature' category also.

The *parinishpanna* or 'thoroughly established nature' corresponds to 'emptinesses', which are 'the ultimate and are the very absence of objects' being established by way of their own character as the referents of conceptual consciousness'. So, thoroughly established natures also fall in the ultimate-non-nature category.

Thus, in the process of setting down the three natures of Reality, one arrives at three categories of non-nature—character-non-nature, production-non-nature, and ultimate-non-nature—the first two non-natures correspond to the *parikalpita* and *paratantra* categories respectively, and the last one to both the *paratantra* and *parinishpanna* groups.

The author also presents an alternative interpretation of these three natures and non-natures, as given by the fourteenth century scholar Shay-rap-gyel-tsen of the Jo-nang-ba order. He also analyses the Ge-luk-ba criticisms of this interpretation.

In any process of perception, the object of perception and the percipient consciousness appear to be two different substantial entities, cut off from each other. But this difference of entity, when analysed, is

not found to be substantive. The object of perception (say, a lotus) and the percipient consciousness (say, the eye consciousness) do exist. But both of them lack a certain quality, i.e. difference of entity. This is called the first type of emptiness, according to the Ge-luk-ba order.

Again, a lotus, when analysed, is in no way established by way of its own character as a referent of the term 'lotus', or as a referent of the thought of a lotus. Same is the case with the imputed attributes of a lotus. The lotus is neither established by way of its own character or by its own mode of subsistence. This is the second type of emptiness, which is generally called the emptiness of factors imputed in manner of entity and attribute. The Ge-luk-ba order holds the view that through the realization of the latter type of emptiness, one enters into the realization of the former type. The relationship of these two types of emptinesses has also been examined in the book.

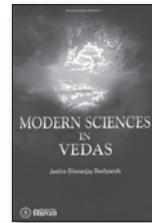
The author has presented a scholarly exposition of these important tenets of the Mind-Only School of Buddhism and taken pains to make them comprehensible to the general reader. But one difficulty with the book is its long sentences, which can be compared to rivulets punctuated here and there by the pebbles of clauses. Understanding the subject matter of the book requires patience and concentration. Those who are acquainted with the terminologies of Buddhism in Sanskrit may find this book difficult, because the author has directly translated them from Tibetan and has avoided giving the equivalent Sanskrit terminologies in parentheses. All the same, this volume helps us understand the fundamental doctrines of the Mind-Only School of Buddhism, as well as its panoramic development in Tibet.

Swami Sanmatrananda

Ramakrishna Mission

Viveknagar

BOOK RECEIVED



Modern Sciences in Vedas

Justice Dhananjay Deshpande

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, K M Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in. 2007. xviii + 294 pp. Rs 270.

A personal attempt at discovering correlations between Vedic texts and the insights and discoveries of modern science.

REPORTS

Sri Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary

The 172nd birth anniversary (tithi puja) of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at Belur Math on Sunday, 9 March 2008. Cooked prasad was served to about 32,000 devotees. Swami Prabhanandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over the public meeting held in the afternoon. The public celebration observed on Sunday, 16 March, drew more than 100,000 visitors, who thronged the Math throughout the day; cooked prasad was served to about 35,000 persons.

New Mission Centre

Ramakrishna Mission, Srinagar, in Jammu and Kashmir, is a new branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission. Its land and buildings were received from Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Srinagar. The new centre's address is Ramakrishna Mission, Shivalaya, Karan Nagar, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir 190 010 (Phone: 0194 247 9141).

Dr Kalam Visits Vijayawada

Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, Bharat Ratna and former President of India, visited **Ramakrishna Mission, Sitanagaram** (Vijayawada), on 3 April 2008. After visiting the ashrama's shrine, garlanding a statue of Swami Vivekananda, and planting a neem sapling, Dr Kalam addressed a large gathering of students and the general public outside the newly built Vivekananda Vidya Vihar. At the outset he advised the students to imbibe the spirit of harmonious living illustrated by Sri Ramakrishna, calling it the need of the day. He also exhorted the students to cultivate creativity, righteousness, and courage, explaining that these virtues pave the way to knowledge and guarantee enlightened citizenship to the individual. He reiterated the importance of building up self-confidence to achieve goals at in-



Dr A J P Abdul Kalam garlands Swami Vivekananda's statue (top), waters a newly planted neem sapling (centre), and answers questions at a function at Vivekananda Vidya Vihar, Sitanagaram (above)

dividual as well as national levels. At the end, he answered several interesting questions posed by the students.

New School Building, Malda

On 16 March, Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly constructed building for the higher secondary school of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda**, and addressed the public meeting organized for the occasion. General Shankar Roychowdhury, former chief of the Indian Army, and Sri Sailen Sarkar, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Environment, West Bengal, addressed the gathering as well.



Swami Smarananandaji (inset) inaugurates the newly constructed building for the higher secondary school of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda



Achievements

Abhishek Kumar, Akash Anand, and Mayank Raj, class-10 students of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidya-pith, Deoghar**, have been selected to participate in the 10th Indian National Astronomy (Junior) Olympiad to be held at the Department of Physics, Indian Institute of Technology, Powai, Mumbai, from 1 to 20 May 2008. The event is organized by Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, in collaboration with the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and the National Centre of the Government of India for Nuclear Science and Mathemat-

ics. The twenty students selected in this event will represent India at the international level.


Yogendra Mahato, a student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur**, studying agro-based bio-technology in the university's faculty centre at **Ranchi (Morabadi)**, has written a dissertation paper titled 'Organic Production of Oyster Mushroom in India'. He and his guide, Prof. RN Varma, have been invited to Germany to make an oral presentation of their findings in the Sixth International Conference on Mushroom Biology and Mushroom Products, organized by the Institute for Mushroom Research, Krefeld, Bonn, Germany, in September and October 2008.

Relief

Centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission conducted relief operations during the month of March as follows:

Winter Relief · A total of 3,700 blankets were distributed to people affected by the severity of winter through the following centres: Antpur (500), Bhubaneswar (500), Ponnampet (100), Vrindaban (2,600).

Distress Relief · The following centres distributed various items to needy persons of nearby areas: Agartala: 250 saris, 100 dhotis, and 125 children's garments; Bhubaneswar: 327 saris; Jalpaiguri: 360 children's garments and 400 saris.

Pilgrimage Service · Rajahmundry centre distributed buttermilk to 20,000 pilgrims and drinking water packets to 4,000 pilgrims for five days during the annual festival of a local temple. 

Corrections · January 2008, p. 80: Swami Vijayananda was the pioneer of Vedanta work in South America and first visited Brazil in 1957. Swami Tilak started his international tours in 1968.

March 2008, p. 192: Upendranath Mukhopadhyaya was born in 1868, not 1886; p. 207: François Delsarte was adopted by Père Bambini in 1823, not 1923.

April 2008, pp. 243, 256, and 269: The artwork and related texts are by students from Sri Ramakrishna Vidyalaya, Mysore, not Sri Ramakrishna Vidyalaya.